

REPRESENTING TALENTED WOMEN IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY CHINESE
PAINTING: *THIRTEEN FEMALE DISCIPLES SEEKING INSTRUCTION AT THE LAKE
PAVILION*

By

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Janet C. Chen

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Abstract

As the first comprehensive art-historical study of the Qing poet Yuan Mei (1716–97) and the female intellectuals in his circle, this dissertation examines the depictions of these women in an eighteenth-century handscroll, *Thirteen Female Disciples Seeking Instructions at the Lake Pavilion*, related paintings, and the accompanying inscriptions. Created when an increasing number of women turned to the scholarly arts, in particular painting and poetry, these paintings documented the more receptive attitude of literati toward talented women and their support in the social and artistic lives of female intellectuals. These pictures show the women cultivating themselves through literati activities and poetic meditation in nature or gardens, common tropes in portraits of male scholars. The predominantly male patrons, painters, and colophon authors all took part in the formation of the women's public identities as poets and artists; the first two determined the visual representations, and the third, through writings, confirmed and elaborated on the designated identities. The works recorded memorable moments of the lives of these women, and their circulation promoted the scholarly personas of the paintings' figures beyond their immediate families. The inscriptions also recorded the positive reception of this coterie of intellectuals and were endorsements of their unconventional behavior. *Thirteen Female Disciples* survives in the form of at least four versions, testifying to the fame and popularity of the painting's theme and the figures depicted in it.

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Finally, I am grateful for the unfailing love and constant prayers from my friends, classmates, and family members; it is to my husband, who has accompanied and supported me over the course of this graduate study, that this dissertation is dedicated.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In 1792, the famous scholar and poet Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–97) left his Harmony Garden (*Suiyuan* 隨園) for a long trip to Mount Tiantai (*Tiantaishan* 天台山), a famous Buddhist site in modern Zhejiang province.¹ An event during this trip inspired a painting, *Thirteen Female Disciples Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion*, which has become one of the most significant visual and textual resources for the study of educated women in Qing-period China. At the time, an increasing number of women were becoming known as writers and artists, and the scroll documents this phenomenon. Yuan Mei, one of the most avid supporters of women writers, commissioned the scroll to commemorate a poetry gathering (*shihui* 詩會) that he and his female disciples enjoyed at the West Lake of Hangzhou, a famous scenic spot. Most of these women came from the Jiangnan area, the lower Yangzi delta region of modern northern Zhejiang and southern Jiangsu provinces. The handscroll has several sections, in the following order: a title panel, the main painting of the gathering created by You Zhao 尤詔 and Wang Gong 汪恭, Yuan Mei's first colophon, a smaller painting of three women, Yuan's second colophon, and more than thirty colophons added by Yuan Mei's literati contemporaries, male and female disciples, and later admirers. Upon Yuan Mei's request, various painters and writers contributed to the piece, making it an important document of not only a remarkable poetry gathering but also the changing public stance on the acceptability of talented women.

¹ According to Yuan Mei, he departed on the twenty-eighth day of the second moon and returned to his Harmony Garden 隨園 in Nanjing on the twenty-first day of the fifth moon. The two writings, “Eryue ershiba ri chumen chongyou Tiantai 二月二十八日出門重遊天台” and “Wuyue ershiyi zi daoia 五月二十一日到家,” which record the dates, are in Yuan Mei, *Xiaocangshan fang shiji* 小倉山房詩集, *juan* 34, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 1, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 821 and 829. For Mount Tiantai, see Shen Yiji 沈翼機, *Zhejiang tongzhi* 浙江通志, *juan* 16 (Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1967), 387–89.

1.1 The Thirteen Female Disciples Scroll

Upon opening the painting, one first encounters the title, *Thirteen Female Disciples Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion* 十三女弟子湖樓請業圖 (fig. 1.1), written in large characters in running script by Wang Wenzhi 王文治 (1730–1802), one of Yuan Mei’s literati acquaintances. Wang was a famous scholar-calligrapher and supporter of women writers. In fact, he was one of literary teachers of Luo Qilan 駱綺蘭 (1755–after 1813), a female disciple of Yuan Mei depicted in the smaller picture in this scroll. Thus, Wang was a particularly appropriate person to provide a title for this painting showing a male mentor in the company of his female students. By contributing his handwriting, Wang tacitly endorsed Yuan Mei’s reception of women poets.

The main painting depicts Yuan Mei and his female disciples enjoying various artistic pursuits in a private garden, and the women are arranged into several groups. The picture opens on the right with a corner of the West Lake and a distant mountain peak gently emerging from the mist. In the foreground, two sisters, Sun Yunfeng 孫雲鳳 (1764–1814) and Sun Yunhe 孫雲鶴, converse while walking under a willow tree toward the left, leading the viewer to the scenes of other gathered students, engaged in various activities.² The fence behind them indicates that the meeting is taking place on private property: the participants are sheltered from the

² Sun Yunfeng (art name Biwu 碧梧) was a writer and painter skilled in painting flowers. Li Junzhi 李濬之, *Qinghuajia shishi* 清畫家詩史, *guishang* 癸上, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong Qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian* 三十三種清代人物傳記資料彙編, vol. 40 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 495. Sun Yunhe (art name: Lanyou 蘭友) was a painter and writer skilled in *ci* 詞 verses and parallel prose 駢體文. Li Junzhi, *Qinghuajia shishi, guishang* 癸上, 496. The dates of some of Yuan Mei’s female disciples and their male relatives are unknown. Unless otherwise noted, they were all active during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

distractions of the bustling world and able to focus on transforming their artistic inspirations into poetry and painting. The controlled environment also protected the women from prying eyes, in particular those of disapproving outsiders.

In front of the Sun sisters, near some garden rocks, is a stairway up to a terrace protected by a balustrade, where one finds the second group of women: Xi Peilan 席佩蘭 (1760–after 1829), Xu Yuxin 徐裕馨 (1765–91), and Wang Zuanzu 汪纘祖.³ Sitting by two *wutong* 梧桐 trees, Xi Peilan plays a *qin*, a zither-like instrument, placed on a stone table. Her elegant fingers stir its strings while Xu Yuxin, seated in front of her, listens. Positioned between them is a small bronze tripod on a stand. Such vessels were used for burning pleasantly fragrant incense or for the appreciation of antique objects, a popular activity at literary gatherings. Standing behind Xi Peilan, Wang Zuanzu has picked an elegant orchid blossom from a nearby cluster, and the viewer is invited to compare the pure beauty of flowers and women.

A path in front of Wang Zuanzu leads toward another group of three women. Wang Shen 汪紳 holds the tip of a banana leaf to make it level; she is about to write on the plant with the brush in her right hand.⁴ Standing behind Wang Shen, the young Yan Ruizhu 嚴蕊珠 tilts her head, places her hand on Wang's arm, and watches the artistic improvisation.⁵ They are attended by a small servant girl who holds an ink stone.

³ Xi Peilan (art names: Yunfen 韻芬 and Daohua 道華) was a poet and painter skilled in drawing orchids. Li Junzhi, *Qinghuajia shishi, guixia* 癸下, 499. Xu Yuxin (art name: Lanyun 蘭蘊) was a poet and painter who followed the Qing painter Yun Shouping 惲壽平 (1633–90). Li Junzhi, *Qinghuajia shishi, guishang* 癸上, 493. Wang Zuanzu (art name: Sihui 嗣徽) was a writer. Shi Shuyi 施淑儀, *Qingdai guige shiren zhenglue* 清代閨閣詩人徵略, *juan 6*, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong Qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian* 三十三種清代人物傳記資料彙編, vol. 41 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 81–2.

⁴ Wang Shen (art name: Shunzai 順哉), Wang's younger sister, and their mother were all poets. Shi Shuyi, *Qingdai guige shiren zhenglue*, *juan 6*, 82.

⁵ Yan Ruizhu (art name: Lühua 綠華) was a poet who died young. Shi Shuyi, *Qingdai guige shiren zhenglue*, *juan 6*, 81.

Behind the third group, three women sit at a wooden table in an area partially enclosed by large rocks and flowering cassia trees: Liao Yunjing 廖雲錦, Qu Bingyun 屈秉筠 (1767–1810), and Zhang Yuzhen 張玉珍.⁶ Liao, at rest from painting plum blossoms in ink, turns toward Qu, as if in a conversation with her. Leaning against the table, Qu Bingyun casts her gaze downward toward Liao's painting. Both women were known as specialists in flower painting; the viewer can imagine them exchanging ideas on their craft. On the table in front of Liao, a long, narrow weight holds the unfinished painting in place. Next to the painting are various tools, including an ink stone, an ink cake, a brush rest, a water container, and another brush. Zhang Yuzhen sits on a chair opposite Liao Yunjing and concentrates on reading the book on her lap. To the left of this group is Jiang Xinbao 蔣心寶, who stands by a cluster of bamboo by a stream. Holding a bamboo stem with her left hand, she tilts her head as if in contemplation, and one can imagine she may be composing a poem about the plant.

Walking across a bridge over the stream, Jin Yi 金逸 (1770–94) holds a round fan with both hands.⁷ On the other side of the stream, behind a large rock next to a pavilion partially covered by two trees, Bao Zhihui 鮑之蕙 (1757–1810) lowers her fishing pole into the water.⁸ In the pavilion, Yuan Mei sits at a wooden desk furnished with a blank piece of paper, writing

⁶ Liao Yunjing (art name: Zhiyun 織雲) was a writer and painter. According to the Qing scholar Jiang Baoling 蔣寶齡, Liao Yunjing was fond of working in the bird-and-flower genre since a young age. In addition, she was skilled at painting orchids in ink. Jiang Baoling, “Zhiyun nüshi 織雲女史,” in *Molin jinhua* 墨林今話 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1992), 156–57. Another source also mentions her ability in painting landscapes. Shi Shuyi, *Qingdai guige shiren zhenglue*, *juan* 6, 80. Qu Bingyun (art name: Wanxian 宛仙), was a writer and painter. Jiang Baoling recorded her skills in painting flowers using the *baomiao* (白描, “plain drawing”) method. Jiang Baoling, “Wanxian nüshi 宛仙女士,” in *Molin jinhua*, 305. One source cited by Shi Shuyi mentions that many of Qu's contemporaries sought her paintings. Shi Shuyi, *Qingdai guige shiren zhenglue*, *juan* 6, 78. Zhang Yuzhen (art name: Lansheng 藍生) was a poet. Shi Shuyi, *Qingdai guige shiren zhenglue*, *juan* 6, 83.

⁷ Jin Yi (art name: Xianxian 織織) was a brilliant poet who died at the age of twenty-five, by Chinese count. Shi Shuyi, *Qingdai guige shiren zhenglue*, *juan* 6, 79–80.

⁸ Bao Zhihui (art name: Chaixiang 菫香) was a poet. Shi Shuyi, *Qingdai guige shiren zhenglue*, *juan* 6, 84.

utensils, and a container full of brushes and rolls of paper. He strokes his beard as if lost in deep thought, perhaps contemplating how to commemorate the event. With him are Dai Lanying 戴蘭英, the wife of Yuan's nephew, and her young son Yuan En 袁恩.⁹ Dai's hand is placed on the back of Yuan Mei's chair, and she tilts her head downward, looking toward the blank paper as if anticipating Yuan Mei's literary creation. Holding a *ruyi* 如意 scepter, Yuan En also looks toward the unrolled paper.

Following the main painting is Yuan Mei's first colophon. Yuan provides the date of the gathering, the names and activities of the participants, and the date of his inscription.¹⁰

During the Qianlong [reign], in the third moon of the *renzi* year [1792], I lodged at the Precious Stone Villa at West Lake. For a time, [my] female disciples from Wu and Gui each came for [my] instructions on poetry. Soon after, [I] requested You and Wang, two gentlemen, to draw a picture and arrange its setting, and I recorded the names [of the participants] after. [I wish the work] to be comparable with *Painting of the Ranks of the Realized Spirits* of Tao Zhenbai.¹¹ Those under a willow tree walking together are the sisters, Sun Yunfeng and Sun Yunhe, two daughters of Sun Lingyi, a surveillance commissioner and the owner of the lake pavilion.¹² Sitting upright and playing *qin* is Xi Peilan, the wife of Sun

⁹ Dai Lanying (art name: Yaoqin 瑤琴) was a writer. Shi Shuyi, *Qingdai guige shiren zhenglue*, *juan* 6, 83.

¹⁰ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own; my translations of the Chinese official and academic titles are from Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1985).

¹¹ Sir Zhenbai 貞白先生 is the posthumous name of Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536), a Daoist active in the Six Dynasties period (265–589). Like Yuan Mei, Tao Hongjing was also a native of modern Nanjing. Li Yanshou 李延壽, *Nanshi* 南史, *juan* 76 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 1897–1900.

¹² Sun Jiale 孫嘉樂 (1733–1800; art name: Lingyi 令宜). The Qing scholar Wang Chang 王昶 (1724–1806), one of the colophon writers for the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll, wrote an epitaph for Sun. The epitaph mentions that his daughters, Sun Yunfeng and Sun Yunhe, who are shown in the *Thirteen Female Disciples*, were capable in poetry and painting. For the epitaph, see Li Huan 李桓, *Guochao qixian leizheng chubian* 國朝耆獻類徵初編, *juan*

Yuanxiang, a classics master of the *yimao* year.¹³ Seated by her side is Xu Yuxin, the granddaughter of Xu Wenmu, a grand secretary.¹⁴ The one picking an orchid is Wang Zuanzu, a daughter of Wang Youxin, a provincial governor of Wanjiang.¹⁵ Holding a brush and inscribing a banana [leaf] is Wang Shen, a daughter of Wang Qiuyu, a classicist.¹⁶ The young girl standing by her shoulder is Yan Ruizhu, a granddaughter of Li Ningren, a surveillance commissioner from Wujiang.¹⁷ Sitting by a table and holding a brush as if in deep thought is Liao Yunjin, a daughter of Liao Gutan, a district magistrate from Songjiang.¹⁸ Holding a scroll and sitting on the other side is Zhang Yuzhen, the wife of Jin Hu, a filial son from Taicang.¹⁹ Sitting at the corner of the table is Qu Wanxian from Yushan. The one standing by bamboo is Jiang Xinbao, a granddaughter of Sir Jiang Jimen, a vice minister of revenue.²⁰ The one holding a round fan is Jin Yi, art name

186, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong Qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian* 三十三種清代人物傳記資料彙編, vol. 16 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 119–20.

¹³ Sun Yuanxiang 孫原湘 (1760–1829) was a scholar, calligrapher, and painter. Li Junzhi, *Qinghuaajia shishi, jixia* 己下, 313.

¹⁴ Xu Ben 徐本 (1683–1747; posthumous name Wenmu 文穆). Xu Ben's biography is in Li Huan, *Guochao qixian leizheng chubian, juan* 19, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong Qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian*, vol. 10 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 363–68.

¹⁵ Wang Xin 汪新 (d. 1798; art name: Youxin 又新). The Qing scholar Zhang Yun'ao 張雲璈, one of the colophon writers for the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll, wrote an epitaph for Wang. For more about Wang and Zhang's text, see Li Huan, *Guochao qixian leizheng chubian, juan* 184, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong Qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian*, vol. 16, 69–73.

¹⁶ For the Wang family, see Yuan Mei, Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua* 隨園詩話, *juan* 12, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 3, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 385.

¹⁷ Li Zhiyun 李治運 (1710–71; art names: Ningren 寧人 and Yiting 漪亭). The epitaph Yuan Mei composed for Li is in Qian Yiji 錢儀吉, *Beizhuan ji* 碑傳集, *beizhuan bashisi* 碑傳八十四, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong Qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian* 三十三種清代人物傳記資料彙編, vol. 27 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 382.

¹⁸ Liao Gutan was a painter and government official from Qingpu 青浦 (modern Shanghai). Jiang Baoling, “Zhiyun nüshi,” 156.

¹⁹ According to Yuan Mei, Jin Hu had the degree of Cultivated Talent, or *xiucai* 秀才. Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua buyi* 隨園詩話補遺, *juan* 1, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 3, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 556.

²⁰ Jiang Ciqi 蔣賜棨 (d. 1802; art name: Jimen 戟門). His grandfather was Jiang Tingxi 蔣廷錫 (1669–1732), a Qing official famous for his bird-and-flower painting. Information on Jiang Ciqi is in Li Huan, *Guochao qixian*

Xianxian, the wife of Chen Zhushi, a cultivated talent from Wuxia.²¹ Holding a fishing pole, her [lower] body covered by [an artificial] hill, is a younger sister of Bao Yatang, a bureau director from Jingjiang.²² Her name is Zhihui, art name Chaixiang, and she is the wife of the poet Zhang Kezhai.²³ In addition to the thirteen people, the one attending by the side of the old man and taking along her son is my nephew's wife Dai Lanying, and her son's name is Enguan. Each of these people has a poetry anthology now entrusted to printmakers. During the first year of the Jiaqing [reign] [1796], on the Birthday of Flowers in the second moon, the old man of the Harmony Garden wrote this at the age of eighty-one.²⁴

乾隆壬子三月，余寓西湖寶石山莊，一時吳會女弟子各以詩來受業，旋屬尤汪二君為寫圖布景，而余為志姓名於後，以當陶貞白真靈位業之圖。其在柳下姊妹偕行者，湖樓主人孫令宜臬使之二女雲鳳雲鶴也。正坐撫琴者，乙卯經魁孫原湘之妻席佩蘭也。其旁側坐者，相國徐文穆公之女孫裕馨也。手折蘭者，皖江巡撫汪又新之女纘祖也。執筆題芭蕉者，汪秋御明經之女婢也。稚女倚其肩而立者，吳江李寧人臬使之外孫女嚴蕊珠也。憑几拈毫若有所思者，松江廖古檀明府之女雲錦也。把卷對坐者，太倉孝子金瑚之室張玉珍也。隅坐於几旁者虞

leizheng chubian, juan 93, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong Qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian*, vol. 12 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 623.

²¹ Chen Ji 陳基 (1771–1845; art name: Zhushi 竹士) was a student of Yuan Mei. Jiang Qiwei 蔣棨渭, “Xiaoyin 小引” in Chen Ji, *Weiqingtang shichao* 味清堂詩鈔 (1850), 1a.

²² Bao Zhizhong 鮑之鍾 (art name: Yatang 雅堂) was a poet who received the degree of Presented Scholar. Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua*, juan 9, 277.

²³ Zhang Xuan 張鉉 (b. 1756; art name: Kezhai, printed Gezhai 舸齋 in Qing sources).

²⁴ Birthday of Flowers was a significant holiday for Chinese women who celebrated it by pinning flowers in their hair and by hitting at butterflies with fans. Ellen Johnston Laing, “Chinese Palace-Style Poetry and the Depiction of a Palace Beauty,” *The Art Bulletin* 72.2 (June 1990): 284–95.

山屈婉仙也。倚竹而立者，蔣少司農戟門公之女孫心寶也。執團扇者，姓金名逸字纖纖，吳下陳竹士秀才之妻也。持竿釣而山遮其身者，京江鮑雅堂郎中之妹，名之蕙字菫香，張可齋詩人之室也。十三人外，侍老人側而攜其兒者，吾家姪婦戴蘭英也，兒名恩官。諸人各有詩集現付梓人。嘉慶元年二月花朝日隨園老人書時年八十有一。

According to the text, the poetry gathering took place in 1792 at the Precious Stone Villa owned by Yuan Mei's friend, Sun Jiale 孫嘉樂 (1733–1800).²⁵ After the meeting, Yuan Mei commissioned two painters surnamed You and Wang to represent the event. The rest of the writing concerns the female participants, Yuan Mei's students. In addition to the women and their activities in the main painting, Yuan Mei mentioned their prominent male relatives and the men's official or academic titles, knowing the audience might be unfamiliar with his disciples due to the proper practice of gender segregation. The fact that Yuan Mei wrote this colophon in 1796, one year before his death, indicates his devotion to women's education and his female students, even at the end of his life.

Following Yuan Mei's first colophon is a smaller painting that depicts three other female disciples, Luo Qilan, Qian Lin 錢林, and Cao Ciqing 曹次卿.²⁶ Yuan Mei's second inscription, to the left of the painting, suggests that the larger picture had been completed prior to the commission of the second, smaller one. Rather than You and Wang, a painter surnamed Cui 崔

²⁵ Yuan Mei called Sun Jiale his *shijiao* 世交, a word indicating that the friendship between the Yuan and Sun families had lasted for more than one generation. Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua*, *juan 2*, 44.

²⁶ Luo Qilan (art names: Peixiang 佩香 and Qiuting 秋亭) was a poet and painter fond of painting orchids. Shi Shuyi, *Qingdai guige shiren zhenglue*, *juan 6*, 81. Qian Lin's art name was Tanru 曇如. Shi Shuyi, *Qingdai guige shiren zhenglue*, *juan 6*, 81.

made the second picture, which contributed to the different style of the women's depiction. Unlike those in the main painting, who are engaged in various scholarly activities, these three appear to be standing outdoors rather aimlessly, amid a few small bamboo plants and grasses. In addition, their clothes are painted with richer color and detail.

Yuan Mei's second colophon mentions that while he was lamenting the deaths of Xu Yuxin and Jin Yi, two female disciples, he was pleased to have three new students, Luo Qilan, Qian Lin, and Cao Ciqing. Yuan's writing reads:

In the spring of the *yimao* year [1795], I returned to the lake pavilion to have a poetry gathering again but had not expected that Xu and Jin, two ladies, had already passed away. For a long time, [I] was disconsolate. Fortunately, three additional people had come for [my] instruction. Unable to include [them] in the former painting, [I] then entrusted my old friend, Mr. Cui, to supply a small picture following [the previous one]. All [the images] were obtained by going to [the women's] homes to depict their likenesses. The one holding a [branch of] peach flowers in her hand is Cao Ciqing, the wife of Liu Xiashang, a cultivated talent.²⁷ The one with flowing drapery, wearing orchids and standing, is Luo Qilan, a female historian from Guqu. The one wearing a red cape and appearing as if in conversation with Luo is Qian Lin, the youngest daughter of Sir Yusha, a provincial administration commissioner of Fujian.²⁸ [They are] all skilled in

²⁷ The art name of Liu Zhipeng 劉志鵬 was Xiashang 霞裳. Zhu Xuzeng 朱緒曾, *Guochao Jinling shizheng* 國朝金陵詩徵 (1887), 27.27a. Yuan Mei called Liu Xiashang his student. Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua*, *juan 2*, 45.

²⁸ Information about Qian Qi 錢琦 (1709–90; art names: Xiangren 相人, Yusha 璵沙, and Gengshi laoren 耕石老人) and the epitaph Yuan Mei composed for him can be found in Li Huan, *Guochao qixian leizheng chubian*, *juan 178*, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong Qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian*, vol. 15 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 652–53.

poetry. Qilan has *Poems from the Tingqiu Studio* in circulation, for which I wrote a preface. Three days before the Qingming Festival, Yuan Mei again wrote [this].

乙卯春, 余再到湖樓重修詩會, 不料徐金二女 都已仙去, 為淒然者久之. 幸問字者又來三人, 前次畫圖不能羈入, 乃托老友崔君為補小幅於後, 皆就其家寫真而得. 其手折桃花者, 劉霞裳秀才之室曹次卿也. 其飄帶佩蘭而立者, 句曲女史駱綺蘭也. 披紅襜褕而若與之言者, 福建方伯璵沙先生之季女錢林也. 皆工吟咏. 綺蘭有聽秋軒詩集行世, 余為之序. 清明前三日袁枚再書。

According to this inscription, another poetry gathering took place at Sun Jiale's lake pavilion in the spring of 1795, three years after the first meeting. By this time, Yuan Mei had admitted three additional female students who were all able poets. Both Yuan Mei's text and the composition of the smaller painting suggest the work to be a group portrait of these three women.

Following Yuan Mei's second inscription are colophons by his literati contemporaries, male and female disciples, and later admirers. Many indicate that their authors composed writings at Yuan Mei's request, suggesting that Yuan welcomed comments on his acceptance of female disciples and associations with them, despite conservative criticism against such practices. These colophons are evidence of the circulation of the two compositions, making possible the promotion of Yuan Mei as a supporter of talented women and of his students as writers and painters.

The *Thirteen Female Disciples* survives today as multiple copies, including three handscrolls in the Suzhou Museum, Shanghai Museum, and Zhejiang Provincial Museum.²⁹ In addition, one was sold through the Christie's auction house in 2010.³⁰ In these four scrolls, the compositions of the two paintings are identical, and most of the colophon writers and contents are the same although the positions of a few texts vary. The variations in the later inscriptions and authors suggest that the scrolls were owned by different collectors. Nonetheless, the multiples bespeak the popularity of *Thirteen Female Disciples* and the fame of Yuan Mei and his female students.

1.2 Yuan Mei: A Biography in Brief

In 1716, during the reign of the Kangxi 康熙 emperor (r. 1662–1722), Yuan Mei was born in Qiantang 錢塘 (Modern Hangzhou 杭州), Zhejiang Province.³¹ Being raised in a family that had produced many scholars prior to his birth, Yuan began studying at a young age.³² As a

²⁹ For reproductions of the Shanghai Museum version, see the following two books: Shane McCausland, *Telling Images of China: Narrative and Figure Paintings, 15th–20th Century, From the Shanghai Museum* (London: Scala, 2010), 144–47; Akita Shiritsu Chiaki Bijutsukan 秋田市立千秋美術館, *Shanghai Hakubutsukan ten: Chūgoku bunjin no sekai: Nitchū kokkō seijōka sanjissūnen kinen* 上海博物館展: 中国文人の世界: 日中国交正常化三十周年記念 (Tōkyō: Yomiuri Shinbunsha, 2002), 88–9 and 142–45. To my knowledge, the Suzhou Museum version has never been published. For the Zhejiang Provincial Museum version, see Xie Jun 谢钧, *Chuanshen adu: Ming Qing renwuhua jingpin zhan* 传神阿堵: 明清人物画精品展 (Nanning: Guangxi meishu chubanshe, 2011), 160–63.

³⁰ The Christie's version was sold May 28, 2010, in Hong Kong. Information and pictures of this scroll are available on the Christie's website, <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/paintings/yuan-mei-you-zhao-18th-5321424-details.aspx?from=salesummary&pos=1&intObjectID=5321424&sid=44d3c89b-cdf7-4da1-94ce-16747c178661&page=1&lid=1>.

³¹ For more detailed biographical accounts of Yuan Mei by modern scholars, see the following sources: J. D. Schmidt, *Harmony Garden*, 1–150; Wang Yingzhi 王英志, *Yuan Mei ping zhuan* 袁枚評傳 (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2002); Zheng Xing 鄭幸, *Yuan Mei nianpu xinbian* 袁枚年譜新編 (Shanghai: Shanghai shiji chubanshe, 2011).

³² Regarding Yuan family members who had academic or official titles, see Jerry D. Schmidt, *Harmony Garden: The Life, Literary Criticism and Poetry of Yuan Mei (1716-1798)* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 4–5.

boy, he received early education from his aunt due to her knowledge in history.³³ In 1722, at the age of seven by Chinese count, Yuan began studying with a scholar named Shi Zhong 史中 (d. 1734).³⁴ Yuan's literary talents and abilities were recognized early on; at the age of twelve, he earned the academic title, Cultivated Talent (*xiucai* 秀才).³⁵

In 1735, the twenty-year-old Yuan Mei was nominated to take the exam called Erudite Learning and Grand Literature (*boxue hongci* 博學鴻詞), a rarely-held, prestigious test designated to recruit scholars with outstanding talents and knowledge.³⁶ He did not pass this special examination; however, his unusual literary talent was evident in his being selected as the youngest examinee.³⁷ Afterwards, Yuan continued to study for the regular civil exam. Three years later, in 1739, he passed the highest examination at the age of twenty-four and earned the academic title, Presented Scholar (*jinsshi* 進士).³⁸ Yuan Mei was then awarded a position in the Hanlin Academy, an imperial institution where the most outstanding scholars from the nation worked.³⁹ However, after three years, he failed an evaluation and was only assigned the position

³³ According to Yuan Mei, due to the early education provided by his aunt, before receiving a more formal education, he was already familiar with the names of Chinese dynasties and historical figures. Yuan Mei, "Wanggu Shenjun furen muzhiming 亡姑沈君夫人墓志銘," in *Xiaocangshan fang wenji* 小倉山房文集, *juan* 5, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 2, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 90–1.

³⁴ Yuan Mei wrote about Shi Zhong in the following texts: Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua* 隨園詩話, *juan* 9, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 3, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 282; Yuan Mei, "Shi xiansheng muzhiming 史先生墓志銘," in *Xiaocangshan fang wenji*, 97; Yuan Mei, "Ji Zhang Youqian xiansheng 寄張有虔先生," in *Xiaocangshan fang chidu* 小倉山房尺牘, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 5, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 71. In this dissertation, people's age is given in Chinese reckoning, unless otherwise noted.

³⁵ Zheng Xing lists the writings related to this event in *Yuan Mei nianpu xinbian*, 21–4.

³⁶ Yuan Mei dated this event to the spring of *yimao* (1795) year in *Suiyuan shihua*, *juan* 14, 459.

³⁷ Zhao Erxun 趙爾巽, *Qingshigao liezhuan* 清史稿列傳, reprinted in *Sanshisian zhong Qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian* 三十三種清代人物傳記資料彙編, vol. 3 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 165.

³⁸ Zhao Erxun, *Qingshigao liezhuan*, 165.

³⁹ Yuan Mei's poem on his entrance to the Hanlin Academy can be dated to the *jiwei* year (1739). Yuan Mei, "Ru hanlin 入翰林," in *Xiaocangshan fang shiji* 小倉山房詩集, *juan* 2, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 1, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 18.

of District Magistrate (*zhixian* 知縣). In the next several years, Yuan Mei served in various locations, including Lishui 漂水, Jiangpu 江浦, Shuyang 流陽, and Jiangning 江寧, all in modern Jiangsu Province.⁴⁰ He also built his Harmony Garden in Jiangning (modern Nanjing 南京).⁴¹

Yuan Mei might have been wearied by being only a minor local official for many years, and he was also distracted by slander, in particular criticism of *New Gazetteer of Jiangning* (*Jiangning shinzhi* 江寧新志), a project he initiated.⁴² Yuan requested sick leave in 1748 and returned to live in retirement in the Harmony Garden in 1749.⁴³ After being released from worldly affairs, he had more freedom to devote himself to literature and eventually made his name known as one of the most influential poets of his era. Yuan's fame attracted many male and female admirers who visited him at his garden property and became his students.

1.3 The Painters of *Thirteen Female Disciples*

In addition to a mention in Yuan Mei's first colophon, a short inscription in the lower-left corner of the main painting indicates the involvement of the artists You and Wang: "You Zhao

⁴⁰ Zhao Erxun, *Qingshigao liezhuan*, 165.

⁴¹ Yuan Mei, "Chude suiyuan, Wang Mengting, Shen Buluo, Shang Baoyi zaijiu wei he, de yuan zi 初得隨園, 王孟亭, 沈補蘿, 商寶意載酒為賀, 得園字," in *Xiaocangshan fang shiji*, *juan* 5, 77. In this poem, two lines read: "Temporarily, [I] invite the owner to first be a guest; in some other days, [I] will exchange the official post for this garden" 暫時邀主先為客, 異日將官易此園. Thus, Zheng Xing argues that when Yuan Mei purchased this property, he was still a government official. Zheng Xing, *Yuan Mei nianpu xinbian*, 182. These lines also suggest that Yuan Mei was planning on retiring in this estate.

⁴² Zheng Xing argues that two reasons contributed to Yuan Mei's wish to retire: in 1747, he was punished for his inability to finish his official duty; in 1748, the compiler of *New Gazetteer of Jiangning* was criticized. Zheng Xing, *Yuan Mei nianpu xinbian*, 186.

⁴³ Yuan Mei recorded in one writing datable to 1748 that he was going to request sick leave. Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua*, *juan* 6, 183. He wrote "Record of Harmony Garden" (*Suiyuan ji* 隨園記) in 1749, mentioning living in this garden property with his younger brother Yuan Shu 袁樹 (b. 1730) and nephew Lu Jian 陸建 (1730–64). Yuan Mei, *Xiaocangshan fang wenji*, *juan* 12, 204–5.

from Loudong sketched the portraits, and Wang Gong from Haiyang made the picture” 婁東尤詔寫照, 海陽汪恭製圖. The fuller identity of Mr. Cui remains unknown. The biographical accounts of and extant paintings by You and Wang suggest that they were professional painters or artists with scholarly affiliations.

You Zhao (art name: Boxuan 伯宣) specialized in portrait painting.⁴⁴ He lived in Wumen 吳門 (modern Suzhou) and had studied with Lu Chunxi 陸春畦, who excelled at portrait painting. After Lu passed away, You and another painter named Jin Qi 金啟 were recognized as the best portrait painters in Wumen.⁴⁵ The Qing-period scholar Jiang Baoling 蔣寶齡 (1781–1840) praised You Zhao’s capabilities: “[The pictures of the sitters who] range from beautiful, ugly, old, to young, through his brush, all have marvelous likenesses. [His rendering of] the cloth pattern and setting are all different from ordinary craftsmen” 凡妍媸老幼, 一經其筆, 無不神似. 衣紋布景, 悉異凡工. Despite You Zhao’s recorded fame, however, I have yet to find any of his paintings other than *Thirteen Female Disciples*. It is possible that he only enjoyed a local reputation.

Wang Gong (art names: Gongshou 恭壽 and Zhuping 竹坪) was from Xiuning 休寧, Anhui province, and was a calligrapher and painter capable of various genres.⁴⁶ One Qing source mentions that he was even skilled in music.⁴⁷ Though he trained to be a businessman, his

⁴⁴ Jiang Baoling has a different *bo* character for You Zhao’s art name, Boxuan 柏宣. This account of You Zhao is based on the following: Feng Jinbo 馮金伯, *Moxiangju huashi* 墨香居畫識, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong Qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian* 三十三種清代人物傳記資料彙編, vol. 43 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 66; Jiang Baoling, “You Boxuan de Lu Xinshan mifa 尤柏宣得陸心山祕法,” in *Molin jinhua*, 231.

⁴⁵ Peng Yuncan 彭蘊瓌, *Lidai huashi huizhuan* 歷代畫史彙傳, *juan* 35, reprinted in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, vol. 1083 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), 557.

⁴⁶ This account of Wang Gong is based on the following: Feng Jinbo, *Moxiangju huashi*, 103; Chen Wenshu 陳文述, *Hualin xinyong* 畫林新詠, reprinted in Zhou Junfu 周駿富, *Qingdai zhuanji congkan: yilin lei* 清代傳記叢刊: 藝林類 (Taipei: Mingwen shuju, 1985), page 079-486.

⁴⁷ Peng Yuncan, *Lidai huashi huizhuan* 歷代畫史彙傳, *juan* 33, 532.

painting ability received positive reception from Wang Wenzhi, the calligrapher who wrote the title panel of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll. Wang Wenzhi encouraged Wang Gong to concentrate on painting and personally taught him calligraphy. In his calligraphy, Wang Gong was able to imitate the regular and running scripts of his teacher and Liang Tongshu 梁同書 (1723–1815), another scholar and colophon writer for the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll. In his painting of landscape, he was particularly well versed in the styles of the Wen family, including Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470–1559), Wen Jia 文嘉 (1501–83), and Wen Boren 文伯仁 (1502–75). Wang Gong was also capable in the figure and bird-and-flower genres. Wang Wenzhi praised his accomplishments: “Zhuping’s landscapes after the school of Xiangguang [Dong Qichang 董其昌] have already ascended to the furthest of [Dong’s] hall, and his sketching from life also reaches the divine category” 竹坪山水于香光一派已升堂奧而寫生亦臻神品.⁴⁸

Wang Gong could have received the commission of creating *Thirteen Female Disciples* through his close association with Wang Wenzhi, a good friend of Yuan Mei. Wang Chengyi 汪承誼, a younger cousin of Wang Gong, was the editor of Wang Wenzhi’s *Kuaiyutang Colophons* 快雨堂題跋. To an entry in this collected writings, Wang Chengyi added a note on the relationship between Wang Gong and Wang Wenzhi: “Zhuping, an uncle from my clan, at Shiyuan Study in Wumen, served the master [Wang Wenzhi] for the longest [time]” 族叔竹坪館于吳門試研齋, 師事先生最久.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Wang Wenzhi, “Wang Zhuping huicao 汪竹坪卉草冊,” in *Kuaiyutang tiba* 快雨堂題跋, in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* 中國書畫全書, vol. 10, ed. Lu Fusheng 盧輔聖 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2000), 818.

⁴⁹ Wang Chengyi’s text follows Wang Wenzhi’s writing, “Wang Zhuping huicao,” in *Kuaiyutang tiba*, 818.

A few of Wang Gong's works have survived; these include an album in the collection of the Anhui Provincial Museum, a fan painting published in the book *Appreciating Chinese Fan Paintings* 中國扇面珍賞, and a portrait in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing. The album contains twelve leaves of landscape and bird-and-flower paintings in the styles of Song (960–1279) and Yuan (1271–1368) masters.⁵⁰ The fan painting is a *meiren hua* 美人畫, literally “beautiful-woman painting,” a popular genre in late imperial China.⁵¹ The portrait was for a Qing person named Yunqiu 韻秋.⁵² These works confirm Wang's abilities in painting various subjects.

1.4 Recent Scholarship on *Thirteen Female Disciples*

Primarily due to its connection with Yuan Mei, *Thirteen Female Disciples* has attracted the attention of several modern scholars. Through an examination of related Qing texts, Wang Yingzhi 王英志 attempts to explain a discrepancy between the depicted gathering and printed records of the event by its participants.⁵³ Gōyama Kiwamu 合山究 tries to reconstruct the depicted gathering through archival studies, and his study of the painting is part of his research on Yuan Mei and Yuan's female disciples.⁵⁴ Wing-chung Clara Ho 劉詠聰 addresses the different attitudes of Yuan Mei and the Qing scholar Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821–1907) toward

⁵⁰ For a reproduction, see plate 156 in Anhui sheng bowuguan 安徽省博物館, *Anhui Sheng bowuguan canghua* 安徽省博物館藏畫 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2004).

⁵¹ For a reproduction, see plate 184 in Zhu Nianci 朱念慈, *Zhongguo shanmian zhenshang* 中國扇面珍賞 (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1999).

⁵² For a reproduction, see plate 112 in Yang Xing 楊新, *Ming Qing xiaoxianghua* 明清肖像畫 (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2008).

⁵³ Wang Yingzhi 王英志, “Yuan Mei ji wai wen shisan nüdizi hulou qingye tu erba kao: jian dingzheng qi liangci hulou shihui shijian de wuji 袁枚集外文十三女弟子湖樓請業圖二跋考: 兼訂正其兩次湖樓詩會時間的誤記,” *Zhongguo dianji yu wenhua* 中國典籍與文化 64 (2008): 72–8.

⁵⁴ Gōyama Kiwamu 合山究, *Min Shin jidai no josei to bungaku* 明清時代の女性と文学 (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 2006), 658–70.

accepting female disciples, and she discusses the painting to exemplify Yuan's interactions with his students.⁵⁵ Jeffrey Riegel publishes an early study of this scroll in English and addresses the following: multiple copies, importance of the colophons, the reason for Yuan Mei's commission, and the discrepancy between the depicted gathering and the textual records.⁵⁶ Luo Yiming 羅以民 uses the difference noted by the above scholars and his observation of the composition and colophons to argue against the authenticity of the work.⁵⁷ In the following paragraphs, I summarize the research by Wang, Gōyama, Ho, and Riegel; in chapter 5, I discuss Luo's arguments and the authenticity of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll.

Through an analysis of Yuan Mei's two inscriptions in the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll and related Qing-period writings—all record two poetry gatherings at Sun Jiale's lake pavilion—Wang Yingzhi discovers a discrepancy between textual descriptions of the 1792 event and the ones shown in the main painting. According to writings by the participants, which have survived as printed texts, thirteen students attended a gathering in 1790, and seven joined the 1792 meeting. However, according to Yuan Mei's first colophon, thirteen disciples were present at the 1792 gathering.⁵⁸ From Wang's perspective, the difference was caused in part by the fading memory of Yuan Mei; as indicated in the first colophon, he was eighty-one years old when the text was written. In addition, according to Wang, Yuan Mei deliberately selected his best students to be represented in the scroll. He argues that Yuan Mei intended the scroll to

⁵⁵ Wing-chung Clara Ho, "Quyuan bushi Suiyuan sou, mowu jinchai zuo zhiren: Yuan Mei yu Yu Yue due nüdizi taidu zhi yitong 曲園不是隋園叟, 莫誤金釵作贊人: 袁枚與俞樾對女弟子態度之異同," *Lingnan xuebao* 嶺南學報 1 (October 1999): 417–72.

⁵⁶ Jeffrey Riegel, "Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1798) and a Different 'Elegant Gathering,'" in *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 32 (December 2010): 95–112.

⁵⁷ Luo Yimin published a biography of Yuan Mei in 2007 and discussed the *Thirteen Female Disciples* in chapter 14, "The Authenticity of the Shenzhou Version of the Thirteen Female Disciples Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion 十三女弟子湖樓請業圖神州版的真偽." Luo Yimin, *Zi cai zi: Yuan Mei zhuan* 子才子: 袁枚傳 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 2007), 211–29.

⁵⁸ Wang Yingzhi, "Yuan Mei ji wai wen," 73–4.

showcase his acceptance of “talents from the inner chamber” (*guixiu* 閨秀) as pupils rather than to accurately represent an event.⁵⁹

At first, Wang Yingzhi’s argument about Yuan Mei’s intentional selection appears convincing, as most of the depicted women were accomplished poets whom Yuan endorsed. In one poem, Yuan Mei singled out Xi Peilan and Sun Yunfeng (the former playing the *qin* and the latter conversing with her sister at the beginning of the main composition) as rarely seen, brilliant talents.⁶⁰ Their capabilities in poetry are evident, as they are the first and second authors in *Selected Poems from the Female Disciples of the Harmony Garden* 隨園女弟子詩選, an anthology Yuan Mei published for his students. Another able writer is Jin Yi (the one holding a fan and crossing the bridge), whom Yuan Mei admired for both poetic talent and literary insights.⁶¹ According to Yuan Mei, Jin Yi’s fellow women poets also recognized her competence and acknowledged her as a leader in literature; in one of their meetings, she impressed local scholars with her knowledge in *Yuejueshu* 越絕書 and *Wuyue chunqiu* 吳越春秋, two early history books.⁶²

Wang Yingzhi’s argument on Yuan Mei’s presentation of the most talented students, however, does not explain the inclusion of Jiang Xinbao and exclusion of Pan Suxin 潘素心.⁶³ Jiang Xinbao (shown standing by a cluster of bamboo) is not an author represented in Yuan Mei’s *Selected Poems*. To date, I have yet to discover her extant writings or primary sources on

⁵⁹ Wang Yingzhi, “Yuan Mei ji wai wen,” 75.

⁶⁰ This poem is a five-character quatrain. The first two lines read: “Talents with painted eyebrows are few; I obtain two wises whom are difficult [to encounter]” 掃眉才子少; 吾得二賢難. The last two lines mention Xi Peilan and Sun Yunfeng are these “two wises.” Yuan Mei, “Er guixiu shi 二閨秀詩,” in *Xiaocangshan fang shiji*, *juan* 34, 847.

⁶¹ Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua buyi*, *juan* 10, 802.

⁶² Yuan Mei, “Jin Xianxian mu zhi 金纖纖墓誌,” in *Xiaocangshan fang xu wen ji* 小倉山房續文集, *juan* 32, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 2, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 587.

⁶³ Pan Suxin (art name: Xubai 虛白) was a poet whose literary talent was recognized at a young age. Shi Shuyi, *Qingdai guige shiren zhenglue*, *juan* 7, 96.

her other than the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll. Thus, Jiang's reception as a writer by her contemporaries is difficult to verify. Pan Suxin was an accomplished writer; even though her works are not included in the *Selected Poems*, she had at least five publications.⁶⁴ Yuan Mei wrote about her, recorded her compositions, and called her a talent from the inner chamber capable in poetry.⁶⁵ Pan Suxin did attend the 1792 poetry gathering at Sun Jiale's lake pavilion, and Yuan Mei recognized her literary ability by giving her poem the second place among those composed by the attendees.⁶⁶

In his book on Ming- and Qing-period women and their writings, Gōyama Kiwamu discusses the poetry gatherings at Sun Jiale's lake pavilion and *Thirteen Female Disciples* as examples of Yuan Mei's interactions with his students. He also places the scroll within the tradition of pictures of "elegant gatherings" (*yaji* 雅集). Similar to Wang Yingzhi, Gōyama recognizes the discrepancy in the dates and participants between the recorded gathering and the depicted one. In Qing texts, he discovers multiple paintings of Yuan Mei's female students and argues that whoever was excluded from the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll could have been included in the other pictures.⁶⁷

Wing-chung Clara Ho addresses the different attitudes of Yuan Mei and Yu Yue toward accepting female disciples. As a famous scholar, Yu Yue attracted talented women wishing to study with him; however, unlike Yuan Mei, he often turned down such requests even when he truly appreciated the literary abilities of the women.⁶⁸ Ho mentions the poetry gatherings at Sun

⁶⁴ For a more detailed account of Pan, see Gōyama, 649–50.

⁶⁵ Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua buyi*, *juan* 4, 647.

⁶⁶ Pan Suxin wrote about the 1792 gathering in "Hulou jishi cheng Suiyuan fuzi 湖樓即事呈隨園夫子," and Yuan Mei included this writing in his *Xu tongren ji* 續同人集, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 6, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 230.

⁶⁷ Gōyama, 662.

⁶⁸ Ho, "Quyuan bushi Suiyuan sou," 466. For the women writers Yu Yue turned down, see pages 467–69.

Jiale's lake pavilion and *Thirteen Female Disciples* as the best representatives of the association between Yuan Mei and his students.⁶⁹ Regarding the discrepancy of event dates and participants, Ho agrees with Wang Yingzhi that Yuan Mei intended the painting to show his acceptance of talented women rather than to document a particular meeting.⁷⁰

Jeffrey Riegel studies the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll within the context of Yuan Mei's support for women writers and places the poetry gatherings at the lake pavilion within the context of elegant gatherings of literati. He recognizes the importance of the colophons, as they occupy the majority of the scroll, and urges for a future study on them from the perspective of China's manuscript culture.⁷¹ He also discovers multiple copies with the same composition. Regarding the discrepancy between the records of the gatherings and the depicted one, Riegel argues that Yuan Mei wished the painters to create "an imaginary roster of some of his favorite female disciples" instead of an actual gathering.⁷² His essay concludes with a translation and interpretation of Xi Peilan's colophon for the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll.

1.5 Thesis Argument

This dissertation is the first comprehensive study, from the perspective of an art historian, to address paintings of and by women in the circle of Yuan Mei. I use the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll as a point of departure to explore representations of female writers and artists in late imperial Chinese painting and the roles such pictures played in the formation of the public identities of such women and the men who supported them.

⁶⁹ According to the reproductions in her essay, Ho studied the Suzhou Museum version.

⁷⁰ Ho, "Quyuan bushi Suiyuan sou," 435.

⁷¹ Riegel, 105.

⁷² Riegel, 107.

Thirteen Female Disciples depicts Yuan Mei enjoying scholarly pursuits in the company of his students, who are wives and daughters of government officials or Yuan's literati contemporaries. Though the picture was based on a poetry gathering that took place in Hangzhou in 1792, the pictorial content was modified and embellished by Yuan Mei due to his concern for gender segregation and his promotion of and delight in his female students. Upon Yuan Mei's request, many men and women contributed colophons to the scroll, making it a distinctive monument to a particular time and coterie of male and female intellectuals. The scroll represents the unconventional lifestyles of a man and women who were able to transcend societal norms and gender boundaries; it also documents a more positive reception of educated women by Chinese society in the late eighteenth century. *Thirteen Female Disciples* now survives in multiple scrolls, and among them are copies made for various reasons, including admiration for the depicted figures, public fascination with the artistic theme, and monetary gain, as the fame of Yuan Mei greatly increased the prices for works related to him. Through their circulation among different owners and viewers, these copies promoted the public reputation of the painting's figures to a broader audience.

As observed by Gōyama and Riegel, in the main painting of the scroll, the figures are divided into groups engaged in scholarly activities in a garden, thus identifying the work as an "elegant-gathering picture" (*yajitu* 雅集圖), a popular subgenre of figure painting. Highlighting the students' abilities in the arts and the depicted scholarly community, the composition encourages the interpretation of these women as self-contained artists and writers. In addition to pictures of elegant gatherings, the painting's two artists also looked to portraits of literati for inspiration and adopted poses from *meiren hua* (美人畫, "beautiful-woman painting"), making

the work a feminine version of the traditionally male elegant-gathering painting, as Riegel suggests.

Although Yuan Mei's female students were known for their scholarly accomplishments rather than their physical appearances, Qing-period authors, including the colophon writers of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll, often referred to them as idealized beauties. The vocabulary they used to compliment the students is the same employed in their texts about paintings of beauties or courtesans. But the artists of the main painting of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll adopted a different approach, and the disciples are shown as individuals with less idealized faces. The architectural boundary between Yuan Mei and the students and the absence of erotic signifiers in the painting also deny an interpretation of the women as entertainers, servants, or deserted women who are attached to men. The public identity of the disciples and function of the scroll affect these artistic choices. The students were women writers and painters from respectable families and were not supposed to be closely scrutinized; the painting was intended to represent Yuan Mei's support for talented women through a representation of a historical event rather than to provide visual pleasure.

Thirteen Female Disciples also represents the broader genre of female portraiture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the popularity of portraits of women writers and artists.⁷³ Other portraits of women in the circle of Yuan Mei have survived; similar to *Thirteen Female Disciples*, these portraits often focus on their subjects as self-sufficient individuals and on their scholarly personas, and the colophons sometimes elaborate on the identity of the sitter beyond the pictorial content. The study of such images furthers the understanding of the social and

⁷³ A recent publication by Yang Binbin address Qing-dynasty female portraiture through her study of painting colophons. See chapter 2, "Visualizing Exemplarity: Women's Portraits and Paintings for Self-Representation," in Yang Binbin, *Heroines of the Qing: Exemplary Women Tell Their Stories* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2016).

artistic lives of these female intellectuals and confirms the importance of the support they received from sympathetic men.

Chapter Two: Historical and Social Contexts for the Production of the *Thirteen Female*

Disciples Scroll

In the eighteenth century, Yuan Mei followed precedents set by earlier literati, including Mao Qiling 毛奇齡 (1623–1716) and Shen Dacheng 沈大成 (1700–71), and became one of the most avid supporters of talented women during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911).¹ He advocated women’s freedom to compose poetry; his view that the *Book of Poetry* (*shijing* 詩經) contains works by women justified his position.² He promoted female intellectuals by writing about them in his collected writings and by including their literary compositions in his publications.³ He also accepted educated women as students and interacted with them through personal meetings,

¹ For more on Mao Qiling, Shen Dacheng, and their female disciples, see Gōyama Kiwamu 合山究, *Min Shin jidai no josei to bungaku* 明清時代の女性と文学 (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 2006), 602–24.

² Both Yuan Mei and his female students believed that the *Book of Poetry* contains poems by women. For Yuan Mei’s view, see Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua buyi* 隨園詩話補遺, *juan 1*, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 3, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 570. For an English translation, see Jeffrey Riegel, “Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1798) and a Different ‘Elegant Gathering,’” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 32 (December 2010), 97. For the opinion of one female disciple, see Luo Qilan, “Tingqiuxuan guizhong tongren ji shixu 聽秋軒閨中同人集詩序,” in *Tingqiuxuan guizhong tongren ji* 聽秋軒閨中同人集, *Jiangnan nüxing bieji* 江南女性別集, *erbian shangce* 二編上冊, ed. Hu Xiaoming 胡晓明 and Peng Guozhong 彭国忠 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2010), 695. In this preface, Luo Qilan lists the poems that she considers written by women, who were imperial consorts (*houfei* 后妃), women with titles or ranks given by the court (*furen mingfu* 夫人命婦), and wives of scholars (*shifu* 士婦).

³ Yuan Mei’s collected works are full of accounts of female writers and their compositions, “talent and beauty” matches, and his associations with talented women. For example, he wrote about the poetic talents of Sun Yunfeng, one of the two sisters at the beginning of the larger painting, by recording her witty reply to a guest’s poem at the age of eight. Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua* 隨園詩話, *juan 2*, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 3, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 44. Susan Mann translates the story and explains the literary reference appearing in this text in *Precious Record* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1997), 92–3. The unfortunate marriage of his younger sister, Yuan Ji, could have led him to appreciate the “talent and beauty” match, and he often recorded such unions; examples include the pairings of his female students Wu Rouzhi 吳柔之 and Pan Suxin 潘素心 with their husbands. Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua buyi*, *juan 4*, 647. One writing by Yuan Mei documents his request for Lady Yixiang 漪香夫人 to inscribe his painting, *Elegant Gathering in the Harmony Garden* (*Suiyuan yaji tu* 隨園雅集圖); later, the two met in Suzhou, where she lived. Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua*, *juan 2*, 43. To promote women’s writings, he published *Selected Poems from the Female Disciples of the Harmony Garden* (*Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan* 隨園女弟子詩選) and included their literary compositions in his *Poetry Talks of the Harmony Garden* (*Suiyuan shihua* 隨園詩話), and *Supplement to Writings by My Companions* (*Xu tongren ji* 續同人集).

written communication, social gatherings, and scholarly exchanges, such as requesting colophons from them, inscribing their paintings, and writing prefaces for their poetry anthologies.⁴ Toward the end of Yuan Mei's life, his support of female writers and artists culminated in two poetry gatherings at Sun Jiale's lake pavilion in Hangzhou.

After a brief overview of the status of talented women in late-imperial Chinese society, this chapter focuses on Yuan Mei's life and views in regard to them. It highlights his familial background, examples of his support of female writers, and the resulting criticism against his relations with these women. The chapter concludes with textual accounts about the two poetry gatherings, which led to the creation of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll.

2.1 The Status of Talented Women in Late Imperial China

In late imperial China, women lived in a society governed by conventions developed centuries earlier by Confucian scholars. These concepts established traditional gender relations, in which women are subordinate to men. One of the expected behaviors of genteel women was called Thrice Following or Three Obediences (*sancong* 三從). According to the *Record of Rites*

⁴ Yuan Mei personally visited talented women. For example, one disciple, Lu Yuansu 盧元素, recorded that Yuan Mei called on her and her husband in 1796; Yuan Mei included her text in his *Xu tongren ji* 續同人集, *guixiu lei* 閨秀類 in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 6, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 247. For instances of written communication, another student, Luo Qilan, included Yuan Mei's letters to her in *Tingqiuxuan zengyan* 聽秋軒贈言, *fu laishu* 付來書, in *Jiangnan nüxing bieji* 江南女性別集, *erbian shangce* 二編上冊, ed. Hu Xiaoming 胡曉明 and Peng Guozhong 彭國忠 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2010), 785–92. Examples of social gatherings included the two poetry gatherings at Sun Jiale's lake pavilion; related writings are translated later in this chapter. Yuan Mei wrote colophons for Luo Qilan's paintings; see Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan* 聽秋軒贈言, 724, 756, 758, 760, 762, and 781. Yuan Mei also requested inscriptions for his paintings from his female pupils. Examples are in Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan* 隨園女弟子詩選, *juan* 1, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 7, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 59, 94, 137, and 145; they concern these paintings: *Elegant Gathering at the Harmony Garden* 隨園雅集圖, *Return for Marriage* 歸娶圖, and *Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion* 湖樓請業圖. Yuan Mei wrote a preface for Luo Qilan's poetry anthology; see Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji* 聽秋軒詩集, reprinted in *Qingdai shiwen ji huibian* 清代詩文集彙編, vol. 446 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010), 761–63.

(*Liji* 禮記), one of the thirteen Confucian classics: “In her youth, she follows her father and elder brother; when married, she follows her husband; when her husband is dead, she follows her son.”⁵ The Confucian classics also advised women of the upper class to remain in the domestic sphere, to limit their male contacts to family members, and to not let their words pass from the women’s quarter to the outside world, in order to uphold the proper gender segregation.⁶

Male scholars valued women’s contributions as “virtuous wives and good mothers” (*xianqi liangmu* 賢妻良母). They viewed female talents in the arts as distractions that would divert women from such traditional female tasks as weaving and sewing.⁷ As the literati expressed in writings, women should concentrate on polishing their Four Virtues (*side* 四德): feminine virtue, speech, demeanor, and work.⁸ This perspective led to a well-known Chinese saying: “A woman without talent is virtuous” (*nüzi wucai bianshi de* 女子無才便是德).⁹ As a result of such beliefs, many educated women in late imperial China believed that their “talent

⁵ Translated in Robin R. Wang, *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture: Writings from the Pre-Qin Period through the Song Dynasty* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2003), 53.

⁶ According to the *Record of Rites*, when a girl reaches the age of ten, she should cease to leave women’s apartments. Wang, *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture*, 59. The phrase, “[women’s] words were not to pass from the women’s quarter to the outside world” (*neiyang buchū qunwai* 內言不出閫外), is translated by Susan Mann, in “‘Fuxue’ (Women’s Learning) by Zhang Xuecheng (1738–1801): China’s First History of Women’s Culture,” *Late Imperial China* 13.1 (June 1992): 50.

⁷ According to the *Record of Rites*, women should be taught “pleasing speech and manners, to be docile and obedient, to handle the hempen fibers, to deal with the cocoons, to weave silks and form fillets, and to learn (all) women’s work...” Wang, *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture*, 59.

⁸ Susan Mann, “‘Fuxue’ (Women’s Learning) by Zhang Xuecheng (1738–1801),” 44. For an English translation of the original text in the *Record of Rites*, see Robin R. Wang, *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture*, 60.

⁹ Dorothy Ko translates this phrase as “a woman is virtuous only if she is untalented” in “Pursuing Talent and Virtue: Education and Women’s Culture in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century China,” *Late Imperial China* 13.1 (June 1992): 1. This saying was first seen in Ming publications by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574–1643) and Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558–1639). Clara Wing-chung Ho, “Nüzi wucai bianshi de shuo de wenhua hanyi 女子無才便是德說的文化涵義,” in *Nüxing yu lishi: Zhongguo chuantong guannian xintan* 女性與歷史: 中國傳統觀念新探 (Hong Kong: Xianggang jiaoyu tushu gongsi, 1993), 89. See also Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York, 2006), 114.

could hinder virtue” (*cai ke fangde* 才可妨德).¹⁰ Some were afraid their literary pursuits would have a negative impact on their reputation and therefore burned their manuscripts. The late Qing female writer Mao Jun 冒俊 felt that women from proper families should not have their writings published because they might be seen as competing with courtesans for literary fame.¹¹ Like Mao, many women were torn between wishing to exercise their literary interests and living within social norms. Some destroyed their manuscripts upon completion; some alluded to this practice by giving their works titles like “saved from burning” (*fenyu* 焚餘).¹² Others justified their writing by naming their anthologies titles designed to assure readers that they gave priority to womanly labor and only engaged in literary activities after finishing their duties.¹³

Despite the limitations of these societal norms, during the late Ming and Qing dynasties, increasing numbers of women were recognized as writers and artists. Support from open-minded male scholars played a crucial role: more gentlemen yearned to belong to a “talent and beauty” (*caizi jiaren* 才子佳人) match, a couple who shared scholarly interests and similar dispositions,

¹⁰ For more on this idea, see Clara Wing-chung Ho, “Zhongguo chuantong caideguan ji Qingdai qianqi nüxing caide lun 中國傳統才德觀及清代前期女性才德論,” in *De, cai, se, quan: lun Zhongguo gudai nüxing* 德, 才, 色, 權: 論中國古代女性, 165–251. Taipei: Maitian chuban, 1998

¹¹ Chen Quan 陳銓, “Ba 跋,” in *Fulu yuanyang ge yigao* 福祿鴛鴦閣遺稿 (1884), 25a. According to the preface to Mao’s collected writings, she specialized in small-seal-script calligraphy and was an able poet who often burned her manuscripts upon finishing them. Her husband published her unburned writings after her death. Yu Xunqing 俞洵慶, “Xu 序,” in *Fulu yuanyang ge yigao*, 1ab.

¹² According to Hu Wenkai 胡文楷 in *Study of Women’s Writings from Successive Generations (Lidai funü zhuzuo kao* 歷代婦女著作考), many female authors included the phrase “survived from burning” (*fenyu* 焚餘) in the titles of their publications. These include: *Poetry Drafts Survived from Burning (fenyu shicao* 焚餘詩草), *Collections Survived from Burning (fenyu ji* 焚餘集), *Manuscripts Survived from Burning (fenyu gao* 焚餘稿), and *Drafts Survived from Burning (fenyu cao* 焚餘草). Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao* 歷代婦女著作考 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1973), 1068–69.

¹³ These titles often include the following phrases: “after embroidery” (*xiuyu* 繡餘), “after weaving” (*zhiyu* 織餘), “after [woman’s] work” (*gongyu* 紅餘), and “after threading the needle” (*renyu* 紵餘). Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, *suoyin* 索引, 1012–13, 1016–17, and 1021–23. See also Kang-i Sun Chang, “Ming-Qing Women Poets and the Notions of ‘Talent’ and ‘Morality,’” 254. Women in the circle of Yuan Mei adopted this practice, including his relative Yuan Tang 袁棠 (1734–71) in her *Manuscripts Chanted After Embroidery (xiuyu yingao* 繡餘吟稿) and his student Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀 (ca. 1762–ca. 1832) in her *Insignificant Draft Composed After Embroidery (xiuyu xiaocao* 繡餘小草). Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, 492 and 784.

and therefore promoted an alternative view of feminine duties and talents.¹⁴ Pursuing such unions and more companionate relationships, these scholars sought learned women for wives and concubines and became patrons of artistic courtesans; some well-known matches during the Ming-Qing transition involved scholars and female entertainers who were known as poets or painters.¹⁵ To such scholars, talented women were ideal partners with whom they could enjoy scholarly activities.

The marriages of several of Yuan Mei's female disciples, including Xi Peilan, Jin Yi, and Wang Qian 王倩, would have been considered "talent and beauty" unions; they married sympathetic men and were thus able to enjoy artistic or literary lives along with their husbands. Xi Peilan, the one playing *qin* in the larger painting of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll, and her husband Sun Yuanxiang 孫原湘 (1760–1829) were both able poets.¹⁶ The husband of Jin Yi, who is holding a round fan in the larger painting, also liked poetry. Yuan Mei recorded that the

¹⁴ The popular culture of the late-imperial era played a crucial role in disseminating the concept of the "talent and beauty" match, as this ideal union became a popular theme in plays and novels. In *The Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan ting* 牡丹亭), Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550–1616) wrote about the perfect union of a young scholar and a beautiful woman that overcame the obstacles of separation, imprisonment, and death, and finally reunited them. The story moved many people, including the early-Qing scholar Wu Wushan's 吳吳山 three wives, who all wrote commentaries on the work. For a study of these three, see Judith T. Zeitlin, "Shared Dreams: The Story of the Three Wives' Commentary on *The Peony Pavilion*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 54.1 (June 1994): 127–79. Another example is *Ideal Love Matches* (*Yizhong yuan* 意中緣) by Li Yu 李漁 (1610–80). In Li's fanciful account of the late-Ming scholars Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636) and Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558–1639), the two both marry courtesan-painters. Ellen Widmer, "The Epistolary World of Female Talent in Seventeenth-Century China," *Late Imperial China* 10.2 (December 1989), 26.

¹⁵ These couples include Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664) and Liu Shi 柳是 (1618–64), Hou Fangyu 侯方域 (1618–55) and Li Xiangjun 李香君, Mao Xiang 冒襄 (1611–96) and Dong Bai 董白 (1624–51), and Ge Zhengqi 葛徵奇 and Li Yin 李因 (1616–85). Kang-i Sun Chang, "Ming-Qing Women Poets and the Notions of 'Talent' and 'Morality,'" 248. For the associations between artistic courtesans and the literati during the Ming-Qing transition, see Wang Hung-tai 王鴻泰, "Qinglou mingji yu qingyi shenghou: Ming Qing jian de jinü yu wenren 青樓名妓與情藝生活: 明清間的妓女與文人," in *Lijiao yu qingyu: qian jindai Zhongguo wenhua zhong de hou/xian dai xing* 禮教與情慾: 前近代中國文化中的後/現代性, ed. Hsiung Ping-chen 熊秉真 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1999), 73–123.

¹⁶ Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua buyi*, *juan* 6, 693. Their harmonious marital relationship is seen in Xi's support for Sun when he took the civil exam and the two read Yuan Mei's letter together. Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua buyi*, *juan* 9, 783–84.

two enjoyed writing and exchanging poems with each other.¹⁷ Wang Qian, a student and an adopted daughter of Yuan Mei, engaged in music and reading with her husband while they traveled together, and many considered them an ideal match.¹⁸

The more positive attitude toward feminine talents and roles helped to expand the content of women's education beyond the Four Virtues and traditional work. The generally amplified wealth of late imperial China allowed open-minded families, in particular those in the lower Yangzi delta region, the traditional heartland of literati culture, to invest in their daughters' education in the arts.¹⁹ Increasing literacy among women led to the emergence not only of many female writers but also of women's societies, in which the members provided support and served as the audience for one another. These groups enabled likeminded individuals to exchange artistic inspirations and to expand their social circles beyond their immediate families.²⁰

But the traditional view of women was still pervasive, and thus support from men was fundamental to the artistic and literary lives of talented women. An open-minded father could allow an artistic education for his daughters, and a sympathetic husband could permit his wife and concubines to pursue their scholarly interests.²¹ Also, these male family members, along

¹⁷ Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua buyi*, *juan 9*, 722.

¹⁸ Yuan Mei recorded the poems by Wang Qian and his adoption of her. Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua buyi*, *juan 9*, 781 and 785. Jiang Baoling 蔣寶齡 mentioned the couple's travels in *Molin Jinhua* 墨林今話, *juan 4* (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1992), 234.

¹⁹ In addition to painting, upper-class women of the Qing dynasty received education in poetry, calligraphy, and music. Susan Mann, "Grooming A Daughter For Marriage: Brides and Wives in the Mid Ch'ing Period," in *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society*, ed. Rubie S. Watson and Patricia Buckley Ebrey (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1991), 214.

²⁰ These women wrote to each other, inscribed the paintings of one another, and enjoyed literary and artistic gatherings together. For a more detailed account of women's communities, see Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1994), 219–50.

²¹ For most of Chinese history, many talented women could not fulfill their literary and artistic interests due to their uncultivated male relatives, in particular their spouses. One example was the Northern Song poet Zhu Shuzhen 朱淑真 (active 1095–1131) who married a vulgar man and thereafter often used her writings to express unhappiness. Unable to meet a person who truly understood her, Zhu eventually died of resentment. For accounts of Zhu, see Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo cao*, 42–5. Sun Yunfeng 孫雲鳳 (1764–1814), one of the two sisters shown at the beginning of the larger painting, also suffered due to a husband who showed abomination when seeing her writing. Jiang Baoling, *Molin jinhua*, *juan 11*, 281.

with unrelated male teachers, provided the social networks that women normally lacked but were necessary for them to become known as writers and painters.

2.2 Yuan Mei's Early Regard of Talented Women, His Acceptance of Female Disciples, and the Resulting Criticism

Yuan Mei grew up in the company of educated women, and this familial background likely nurtured his lifelong support of talented women. His mother, Lady Zhang 章, when resting from her needlework, entertained herself by chanting Tang poetry.²² As a young boy, Yuan Mei received education from his aunt, who had become a widow and returned to live with the Yuan family.²³ When he reached the age of seven, he and his younger sister, Yuan Ji 袁機 (1720–59), studied together with a scholar named Shi Zhong 史中 (d. 1734).²⁴ Yuan Mei's other educated female relatives included another younger sister, Yuan Zhu 袁杼 (ca. 1727–ca.1776), and his cousin Yuan Tang 袁棠 (1734–71).²⁵

²² Yuan Mei, “Xianbi Zhang tairuren xingzhuang 先妣太孺人行狀,” in *Xiaocangshan fang xu wenji* 小倉山房續文集, *juan* 27, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 2, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 478.

²³ Yuan Mei wrote an epitaph for his aunt but did not record her name. He only mentioned that she married into a family named Shen. Yuan Mei, “Wangu Shenjun furen muzhiming 亡姑沈君夫人墓志銘,” in *Xiaocangshan fang wenji* 小倉山房文集, *juan* 5, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 2, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 90–1.

²⁴ Yuan Mei wrote that he and Yuan Ji sat shoulder-to-shoulder when receiving education in the Confucian classics from Shi Zhong. Yuan Mei, “Jimeiwen 祭妹文,” in *Xiaocangshan fang wenji*, *juan* 14, 229. For Shi Zhong, see the following texts: Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua*, *juan* 9, 282; Yuan Mei, “Shi xiansheng muzhiming 史先生墓志銘,” in *Xiaocangshan fang wenji*, 97; Yuan Mei, “Ji Zhang Youqian xiansheng 寄張有虔先生,” in *Xiaocangshan fang chidu* 小倉山房尺牘, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 5, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 71.

²⁵ To transmit the writings of Yuan Ji, Yuan Zhu, and Yuan Tang, Yuan Mei published *Collected Manuscripts of the Three Younger Sisters of the Yuan Family* (*Yuanjia sanmei hegao* 袁家三妹合稿). For information about Yuan Zhu and Yuan Tang, see Shi Shuyi 施淑儀, *Qingdai guige shiren zhengluo* 清代閨閣詩人徵略, *juan* 4, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong Qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian* 三十三種清代人物傳記資料彙編, vol. 41 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 58. A few of Yuan Mei's granddaughters, including Yuan Qing 袁青 and Yuan Shu 袁淑, were also poets who had poetry anthologies circulated. Chen Wenshu 陳文述, *Xiling guiyong* 西泠閨詠, *juan* 12, reprinted in

Yuan Mei was especially close to Yuan Ji. In addition to her biography, he wrote “Eulogy to My Younger Sister” (*jimeiwén* 祭妹文) and “Mourning for My Third Younger Sister with Fifty Rhymes” (*ku sanmei wushi yun* 哭三妹五十韻) to express his affection when she passed away.²⁶ These texts reveal not only the bond between brother and sister but also Yuan Mei’s sympathy toward the talented women who experienced misfortune.²⁷ Yuan Ji had returned to her natal family home to escape her violent husband; while Yuan Mei deplored her ill match, he was pleased to have this educated sister at home, for she could assist the family with work that required reading and writing.²⁸ At the end of the eulogy, he mentioned that care was arranged for not only Yuan Ji’s daughter but also her poems; these writings were entrusted to printmakers for publication, suggesting the importance that he felt of preserving her voice and literary achievements.

In his middle age, Yuan Mei was determined to help talented women, as exemplified by an incident involving a female writer named Zhang Wanyu 張宛玉.²⁹ As a district magistrate of Jiangning, Yuan encountered Zhang, who had been captured for running away from her husband. To explain her situation, Zhang presented a poem that likened her to a pure, fragrant flower accidentally acquired by a businessman and compared Yuan Mei to the Tang poet Bai Juyi 白居易

Congshu jicheng xubian 叢書集成續編, vol. 64 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1994), 570. For *Collected Manuscripts of the Three Younger Sisters of the Yuan Family* (*Yuanjia sanmei hegao* 袁家三妹合稿), see this publication in *Yuan Mei quanji*, vol. 7, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993).

²⁶ For Yuan Ji’s biography, see Yuan Mei, “Nüdi Suwen zhuan 女弟素文傳,” in *Xiaocangshan fang wenji*, *juan* 7, 132–33. For “Eulogy to My Younger Sister,” see Yuan Mei, “Jimeiwén,” in *Xiaocangshan fang wenji*, *juan* 14, 228–30. For “Mourning for My Third Younger Sister with Fifty Rhymes,” see Yuan Mei, “*Ku sanmei wushi yun* 哭三妹五十韻,” in *Yuanjia sanmei hegao*, 61–2.

²⁷ Yuan Mei also bemoaned the talented women who died young in the epitaph he wrote for Jin Yi 金逸, the woman shown holding a round fan in the main painting. For a translation, see Riegel, “Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1798) and a Different ‘Elegant Gathering,’” 101.

²⁸ The information about Yuan Ji is drawn from her biography and eulogy written by Yuan Mei, mentioned earlier.

²⁹ Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua*, *juan* 4, 111.

(772–846), who had listened with compassion to the story of a female *pipa* player, a former entertainer turned merchant’s wife.³⁰ Zhang’s fine composition, however, made Yuan suspect that she had a ghostwriter. He tested her in person, asking her to improvise a poem on a dead tree, which again was well done. Eventually he released her; from his perspective, the marriage between a talented woman and a vulgar businessman was not ideal.

In Yuan Mei’s later years, he encouraged female poets by accepting them as disciples, and these students often came from the families of his male literati acquaintances. For example, Sun Yunfeng and Sun Yunhe, the two sisters portrayed at the beginning of the larger painting, were the daughters of Sun Jiale, an old family friend of Yuan Mei and the owner of the garden site depicted in *Thirteen Female Disciples*; Xi Peilan, the one shown playing *qin*, was the wife of Sun Yuanxiang, a poetry student of Yuan Mei; Qian Lin, who appears wearing a red cape in the smaller painting, was a daughter of Qian Qi 錢琦 (1709–90), a classmate of Yuan Mei.³¹

What distinguished Yuan Mei from other men who also had female students was the number of pupils he accepted.³² The accounts by his contemporaries suggest there were many; the Qing scholar Wang Linshu 王麟書 said: “Sir, in Hangzhou, has several tens of female students, [who are] all most wonderfully talented” 公在杭有女弟子數十人，皆絕妙才也。³³

³⁰ The preface that records this encounter and the poem, “Song of the Lute 琵琶行,” is translated by Burton Watson in *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations*, vol. 1, ed. John Minford and Joseph S. M. Lau (New York: Columbia University, 2002), 890–93.

³¹ Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua*, *juan* 2, 44; *juan* 9, 783; *juan* 12, 409. Jerry Schmidt suggests that, in addition to Yuan Mei’s sympathy for the women or appreciation of their literary achievements, his literary theory of “nature and inspiration” (*xinglingshuo* 性靈說) also affected his decision to accept female students. Jerry D. Schmidt, “Yuan Mei (1716–98) on Women,” 147.

³² Other similarly minded literati include Mao Qiling 毛奇齡 (1623–1716), Shen Dacheng 沈大成 (1700–71), Chen Wenshu 陳文述 (1771–1843), and Ren Zhaolin 任兆麟 (active 1776–1823). For Mao, Shen, Chen and their female disciples, see Gōyama Kiwamu, *Min Shin jidai no josei to bungaku*, 602–24, and 671–718. For Ren Zhaolin and his students, see Dorothy Ko, “Lady-Scholars at the Door: The Practice of Gender Relations in Eighteenth-Century Suzhou,” in *Boundaries in China*, ed. John Hay (London: Reaktion, 1994), 198–216.

³³ Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan bashi shouyan* 隨園八十壽言, *juan* 4, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 6, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 85.

Gōyama Kiwamu and Wang Yingzhi, two modern scholars, both identify more than fifty female students of Yuan Mei.³⁴ This large number supports Yuan's reputation as a scholar and as a mentor of women. Yet it also suggests that he might not have maintained strict criteria for admission; he sometimes took into consideration factors other than the women's literary talents and achievements, such as politeness to certain authorities. For example, when Yuan Mei traveled in his later years, his fame made him a welcome guest of local government figures and scholars. Some of these gentlemen requested that Yuan Mei receive their female relatives as pupils. Yuan's acceptance of Wutong 梧桐, Xiuxiang 袖香, and Yuexin 月心, three concubines of a local governor named Ming Bao 明保, was likely out of deference to the governor. The three women were accepted by Yuan Mei right before the 1792 poetry gathering at Sun Jiale's lake pavilion, yet he did not further touch upon this matter nor include any of them in *Selected Poems from the Female Disciples of the Harmony Garden*, a poetry anthology dedicated to his students.³⁵

Some Qing scholars, including Zhang Xuecheng, concerned with proper gender segregation and criticized Yuan Mei's acceptance of female students and interactions with them. In his criticism, Zhang deployed the popular idea of "talent and beauty" unions and implied that the associations between Yuan Mei and his disciples were impure:

³⁴ For Gōyama's study, see *Min Shin jidai no josei to bungaku*, 626–55. For Wang's, see *Yuan Mei pingzhuan* 袁枚評傳 (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2002), 276. As Wang Yingzhi suggests, some of Yuan Mei's female relatives studied with him and should also be counted as his pupils.

³⁵ This event is recorded in two sources: Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua buyi*, *juan* 5, 671; Yuan Mei, "Ji huai qian Hangzhou taishou Ming Xizhe xiansheng 寄懷前杭州太守明希哲先生," in *Xiaocangshan fang shiji* 小倉山房詩集, *juan* 35, in *Yuan Mei quan ji* 袁枚全集, vol. 1, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 864. *Selected Poems from the Female Disciples of the Harmony Garden* was devoted to the writings by twenty-eight students of Yuan Mei. The late-Qing scholar Jiang Dunfu 蔣敦復 (active 19th century) argued that these authors were close to Yuan Mei and were able to attend the poetry gatherings at Sun Jiale's lake pavilion. Jiang Dunfu, *Suiyuan yishi* 隨園軼事, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 8, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 104. Jiang Dunfu was a friend of Yuan Zude 袁祖德, a grandson of Yuan Mei, and therefore his account was likely derived from his association with the Yuan family. Jiang Dunfu, *Suiyuan yishi*, 1.

Recently there has been a shameless madman who styles himself a romantic but who bewitches and seduces women of scholar families. For the most part, he fools them by playing the role of a “talented man” with these “young beauties,” as in plays performed by lowly actors. Many women from great families south of the Yangzi River have been seduced by him. He asks for their poems and publishes their manuscripts in order to boost their fame, but he fails to maintain the proper distance between man and woman, while [these women] almost forget that they have female bodies.³⁶

Yu Yue 俞樾 (1821–1907, art name: Quyuan 曲園) was also a famous Qing-period scholar who attracted several women wishing to study with him. However, unlike Yuan Mei, he often turned down such requests even when he truly appreciated their literary abilities.³⁷ Yu Yue stated his reasons and mentioned Yuan Mei in a series of three poems composed to reject Zhang Ruixian 張蕊仙. The first poem reads:

[The life of this] eighty-four-year-old man approaches	八十四翁行就木,
the wooden [coffin];	
[His] vain reputation was gained without effort, false	虛名浪竊本非真.
from the beginning.	

³⁶ This statement is translated by Jerry Schmidt in “The Golden Age of Classical Women’s Poetry in China: Yuan Mei (1716–98) and His Female Disciples,” *China Report* 40 (2004): 243.

³⁷ Wing-chung Clara Ho 劉詠聰 studies the attitudes of Yuan Mei and Yu Yue toward accepting female disciples in her essay, “Quyuan bushi Suiyuan sou, mo wu jinchai zuo zhiren: Yuan Mei yu Yu Yue dui nüdizi taidu zhi yitong 曲園不是隨園叟, 莫誤金釵作贊人: 袁枚與俞樾對女弟子態度之異同,” *Lingnan xuebao* 嶺南學報 1 (October 1999): 417–72. For the women writers Yu Yue turned away, see pages 467–69.

As I, Qu Yuan, am not the Old Man of Harmony
Garden,³⁸

曲園不是隨園叟，

[I] will not err by making ‘gold hairpins’ my students.³⁹

莫誤金釵作贄人。⁴⁰

In this poem, Yu attempts to distinguish his and Yuan Mei’s different attitudes toward accepting female students. To Yu, refusing to accept women preserved both his and their reputations, as gender segregation was conventionally proper for the era’s upper class.

In a series of four poems composed for a painting titled *Harmony Garden’s Thirteen Female Disciples Seeking Instruction* 隨園十三女弟子請業圖, Yu Yue sarcastically comments on Yuan Mei and his students. In the first two poems, he refers to Yuan as “Yuan silk” (*yuansi* 袁絲) and the “Lord Ape” (*yuangong* 猿公) and the women as “gorgeous peaches” (*nongtao* 穠桃), “resplendent plums” (*yanli* 豔李), and “moth eyebrows” (*emei* 蛾眉).⁴¹ The two poems read:

³⁸ “Suiyuan old man” stands for Yuan Mei.

³⁹ “Gold hairpins” also stand for concubines. *Chongbian guoyu cidian* 重編國語辭典 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1981), 2647–48. *Zhi* 贄 means the gift presented at the first-time meeting, and thus I translate *zhiren* 贄人 as students. *Chongbian guoyu cidian*, 3465.

⁴⁰ Yu Yue added two notes to this series, one at the end of the second poem and the other at the end of the third one. The first note indicates that Yu Yue also declined another woman named Liu Guxiang 劉古香. According to the second note, although Yu Yue turned down the request of Zhang Ruixian, he still wrote a preface for her poetry anthology because he admired her poetic capabilities and honored her wish to study with him. Yu Yue’s poems are in “Jiangyou nüshi Zhang Ruixian peilan zhi Wu qiujian toushi sishou yu he qisan yi xiezhi 江右女史張蕊仙配蘭至吳求見投詩四首余和其三以謝之,” in *Chunzaitang shibian* 春在堂詩編, *juan* 21, reprinted in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, vol. 1551 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), 619.

⁴¹ Yuan Mei referred to himself as Yuan Si. Yuan Mei, “Congfu pangong shi 重赴泮宮詩,” in *Xiaocangshan fang shiji*, *juan* 32, 767.

<p>The instruction on the classics never reaches genteel women.⁴²</p> <p>And they only hear stringed and woodwind instruments gathered in the back chamber.⁴³</p> <p>Heaven has allowed the Master to create a new standard; Gorgeous peaches and resplendent plums fill [his] gate and walls.⁴⁴</p> <p>On a spring day, at a lake pavilion, during an elegant gathering,</p> <p>Moth eyebrows surround and bow to old Yuan silk.⁴⁵</p>	<p>授經從不到姬姜， 絲竹徒聞集後堂。 天為先生開創格， 穠桃豔李滿門牆。 春日湖樓雅集時， 蛾眉羅拜老袁絲。</p>
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⁴² During the Spring and Autumn period (770–ca. 475 BCE), Ji was the surname of the kings of the Zhou state, and Jiang was the surname of the kings of the Qi state. Thus, *jijiang* 姬姜 stands for noblewomen. Yu Yue possibly used the term to refer to women who were wives and daughters of scholars or government officials. *Cihai* 辭海 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1979), 2523.

⁴³ With this line, Yu Yue compares Yuan Mei to the Eastern Han scholar Ma Rong 馬融, who taught students in front of a red-gauze curtain; behind the curtain were female musicians. In Ma Rong's biography, the author comments that he "was not burdened by worldly affairs, acted on his own will, and did not confine himself to Confucian scholars' moral principles" 達生任性, 不拘儒者之節. Fan Ye 范曄, "Ma Rong liezhuan di wushi shang 馬融列傳第五十上," in *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, *juan* 90, *shang* 上 (Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 12a.

⁴⁴ "Gorgeous and resplendent" (*nongyan* 濃豔) refers to the beauty of flowers. "Peaches and plums" (*taoli* 桃李) indicates that one has many students. Yu Yue combined these two phrases to say that Yuan Mei accepted beauties as students. *Chongbian guoyu cidian*, 1059 and 1359. The word "gate and walls" symbolizes admission to teacher-disciple relationship. *Chongbian guoyu cidian*, 475.

⁴⁵ The phrase "moth eyebrow" was used to describe the brows of beautiful women; it usually refers to beauties. *Cihai*, 4268. "Yuan silk" appears in a poem by Xi Peilan, one of Yuan Mei's female disciples. Two lines in this poem read: "[I] wish to buy the five-colored thread of Hangzhou; thread after thread, [I] personally embroider the Yuan silk" 願買杭州五色絲, 絲絲親自繡袁絲, with the same character as Yuan Mei's surname. Since the earlier portion of this poem speaks of Xi Peilan's admiration for Yuan Mei, the two lines imply her wish to study with him. The poem is in Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua buyi*, *juan* 8, 741.

Either he lived in Kuocang Cave in a previous
incarnation.⁴⁶

括蒼洞裡前身，

Or maybe Lord Ape was originally female.⁴⁷

或者猿公本是雌。⁴⁸

The first two lines speak of Yu Yue's refusal to accept female disciples, which differentiates him from Yuan Mei. The phrases "gorgeous peaches," "resplendent prunes," and "moth eyebrows" all suggest that Yuan's students are beauties and therefore stand for Yu's surmise that Yuan's criteria of admission were based on the women's physical appearances. The second poem concludes with the remark that Yuan Mei could have been a woman in a previous incarnation, as this would explain why he was so supportive of talented women and engaged in a practice deemed unacceptable by conservative scholars.

Yuan Mei's comments about women's physical appearances, in particular those of his female students, also led to criticism against his interactions with them. In "Eulogy for Lady Jin Xianxian" (*Jin Xianxian nüshi muzhiming* 金纖纖女士墓誌銘), Yuan Mei wrote of Jin Yi, the

⁴⁶ Kuocang Cave is a Daoist site located on Mount Kuocang 括蒼山 in modern Zhejiang province. Wang Fen 王綦, *Guangxu Xianju zhi* 光緒仙居志, reprinted in *Zhongguo difangzhi jicheng: Zhejiangfu xianzhi ji* 中國地方志集成: 浙江府縣志輯, vol. 48 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1993), 42–3.

⁴⁷ The phrase "Lord Ape" could refer to the story of an old man called Sir Yuan 袁公, who turned into a white ape after he tested the swordsmanship of a woman. Zhao Ye 趙曄, "Wuyue chunqiu Gou Jian yinmou waizhuan dijiu 吳越春秋勾踐陰謀外傳第九," in *Wuyue chunqiu* 吳越春秋, *juan* 9 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1922), 13b–14a. Since *yuán* (猿) is a pun on Yuan Mei's surname *yuán* (袁), Yu Yue likely used the term to refer to Yuan Mei. This phrase can also be a reference to "Oubei's Accusing Words" (*Oubei kongci* 甌北控詞), a playful assertion that was recorded as made by Zhao Yi 趙翼, one of Yuan Mei's friends, that in Yuan Mei's previous incarnation, he was an ape spirit that escaped from Mount Kuocang. This writing is included in Xiao hengxiangshi zhuren 小橫香室主人, *Qingchao yeshi daguan* 清朝野史大觀, *juan* 10 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1981), 13. Zhao Yi's comparison of Yuan Mei to an ape is also recorded in two texts. One is in a note in a congratulatory writing for Yuan Mei's eightieth birthday by Wang Fengsheng 王鳳生, in Yuan Mei, *Bashi shouyan* 八十壽言, *juan* 2, reprinted *Yuan Mei quanji*, vol. 6, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 20. The other is by Jiang Dunfu 蔣敦復, a friend of Yuan Mei's grandson Yuan Zude 袁祖德. Jiang Dunfu, "Diancangshan baiyuan lai bai 點蒼山白猿來拜," in *Suiyuan yishi*, 37.

⁴⁸ Yu Yue, "Wu Jiying yi suocang Suiyuan shisan nüdizi qingye tu suoti shuaishu si jueju 吳季英以所藏隨園十三女弟子請業圖索題率書四絕句," in *Chunzaitang shibian*, *juan* 14, 515.

woman carrying a round fan and crossing a bridge in *Thirteen Female Disciples*: “From the time she was born, she was delicate and fragile and had a countenance of surpassing beauty.”⁴⁹ His remarks on Cao Ciqing 曹次卿, the one holding a branch of peach flowers in the scroll’s smaller picture, were recorded and criticized by Yu Yue:

[Yuan Mei] also recorded that Liu Xiashang’s wife, Ms. Cao, has a nice face and delicate eyes and eyebrows; unfortunately, [her] skin is not [like] jade and snow and [her] fingers lack [the look of] the green onion, [her appearance] is only six or seven [on a one to ten scale]. Taking a student’s wife and evaluating [her] to this extent is also too indecent.

又載劉霞裳之妻曹氏臉盤好，眉目秀，惜肌膚非玉雪，手爪欠青蔥，祇算六七分。以門生之婦而評騭至此，亦殊太褻。⁵⁰

Accounts like these thus led some to suspect Yuan Mei’s true intentions in helping talented women and the nature of his appreciation.

The disapproval expressed by conservative scholars was probably based on speculation, as I have yet to find evidence of Yuan Mei having improper relationships with his female students. In fact, he only accepted them later in his life, suggesting that he was sensitive to the effect this might have on his and their reputations.⁵¹ Yuan Mei expressed his views on admitting female pupils in one of a series of seven poems that named delights in his old age.⁵² In the poem,

⁴⁹ Translated by Kang-i Sun Chang, in “Ming-Qing Women Poets and the Notions of ‘Talent’ and ‘Morality,’” 257.

⁵⁰ Yu Yue, *Chunzaitang suibi* 春在堂隨筆, *bishi* 筆十 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1969), 456.

⁵¹ According to Gōyama Kiwamu, Yuan Mei accepted his first female pupil, Chen Shulan 陳淑蘭, in 1783 when he was already in his late sixties. Gōyama, *Min Shin jidai no josei to bungaku*, 658.

⁵² This poem is translated by Jerry D. Schmidt, in “Yuan Mei (1716–98) on Women,” 146.

he compares himself to the Western Han scholar Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝, a teacher of the imperial harem, to justify providing education to women.⁵³ To convey a purely mentor-pupil relationship, the poem states that Yuan Mei's students treated the occasion of receiving instruction with high respect by wearing austere makeup. The last line of the poem asserts that Yuan Mei's advanced age made possible and acceptable the relationships between him and his female disciples.

2.3 Writings Related to the Two Poetry Gatherings at Sun Jiale's Lake Pavilion and Differences between Textual and Visual Documentation of the 1792 Gathering

Yuan Mei's two colophons in the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll record two poetry gatherings at Sun Jiale's lake pavilion, in 1792 and in 1795, credit them as leading to the creation of the handscroll, and identify the 1792 meeting as the theme of the larger painting. Writings by Yuan Mei and his female students also document two events at the same location; however, these sources state that one took place in 1790 and the other in 1792. In the following paragraphs, these literary compositions are translated and examined to provide historical context and to address the differences between the textual and visual records of the 1792 gathering.

In the spring of 1790, Yuan Mei's female students took the opportunity of his visit to Hangzhou to meet with him at Sun Jiale's estate. Yuan wrote about this gathering, indicated the purpose of his stay with the Sun family, and recorded the number of the participants:

In the spring of the *gengxu* year [1790], [I] swept [my familial] tomb in Hangzhou. [There, my] female disciple Sun Biwu invited thirteen ladies to have a grand gathering at a lake pavilion. They each presented poems and paintings as

⁵³ For Xiahou Sheng, see Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* 漢書, *juan* 75 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 3155.

gifts [to me]. I prepared two feasts to receive them. Xu Yuxin, a granddaughter of Sir Wenmu, a Grand Secretary, follows Nantian in painting...

庚戌春, 掃墓杭州. 女弟子孫碧梧邀女士十三人大會于湖樓, 各以詩畫為贄, 余設二席以待之. 徐裕馨, 相國文穆公之孫女也, 畫法南田...⁵⁴

This text mentions Sun Yunfeng (art name: Biwu) as the organizer of the 1790 event and Xu Yuxin as one of the participants. The rest of the writing is devoted to poems composed at the gathering; unfortunately, Yuan Mei did not include the names of the authors, so the list of attendees is incomplete.

One letter from Yuan Mei to Wang Shen, one of his female disciples, records her participation in the 1790 poetry gathering and ability in calligraphy.⁵⁵ Referring to Wang as a younger sister, Yuan Mei's letter reads:

This year, during the fourth month, [I] briefly lodged in the West Lake [area]. I was obliged that various ladies did not shun [my] decrepitude; “fragrant carts” [women] came to seek instruction... [I] saw younger sister gracefully alight and wield the brush in front of guests ...

今歲清和之月, 小住西湖. 蒙諸女士不棄衰頹, 香車問字... 忽見世妹驚鴻飛下,
對客揮毫...

⁵⁴ Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua buyi*, *juan* 1, 553. Nantian is the art name of the Qing painter Yun Shouping 惲壽平 (1633–90).

⁵⁵ Although this letter is not dated, the mentioning of Yuan Mei's age, seventy-five by Chinese count, refers to 1790.

Yuan Mei made reference to the 1790 gathering in one of twelve poems commemorating his stay with the Sun family that year. In this poem, he refers to his female students as “red cosmetics” and himself as the Han-period Lulingguang Palace that survived dynastic change, crediting his great literary achievements for his attraction of many followers:

The red cosmetics also appreciate the Lulingguang Palace. ⁵⁶	紅妝也愛魯靈光，
Seeking instructions, [they] vied to come to the Precious Stone Villa.	問字爭來寶石莊。
Suppressing the three thousand peach and plum trees, ⁵⁷	壓倒桃李三千樹，
Star beauties and moon maidens are within [my] gate and walls.	星娥月姊在門牆。 ⁵⁸

The second line confirms the gathering’s location as stated in Yuan Mei’s first colophon: the Precious Stone Villa (*Baoshi shanzhuan* 寶石山莊). Following this poem is a note citing the number of female students who attended this meeting and a few names: “Thirteen daughters from distinguished families, including Zhang Bingyi, Xu Yuxin, and Wang Shen, received instruction in poetry and had a grand gathering at a lake pavilion” 女公子張秉彝徐裕馨汪紳等

⁵⁶ Wang Yanshou 王延壽, “Lulingguang dian 魯靈光殿,” in *Zengbu liuchen zhu wenxuan* 增補六臣註文選, ed. Li Shan 李善 (Taipei: Huazheng shuju, 1977), 213.

⁵⁷ The phrase “peach and plum” refers to Yuan Mei’s male students. One early use of the phrase to refer to students is in a poem by the Tang poet Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫, in “Xuan shangren yuanji he libu Wang shilang fangbang hou shi yiner jihe 宣上人遠寄和禮部王侍郎放榜後詩因而繼和,” reprinted in *Quan tangshi* 全唐詩, *juan* 359 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 897.

⁵⁸ Yuan Mei, “Gengxu chunmu yu xihu baoshi shanzhuang, linxing fushi jishi 庚戌春暮寓西湖孫氏寶石山莊, 臨行賦詩紀事,” in *Xiaocangshan fang shiji*, *juan* 32, 793.

十三人，以詩受業，大會於湖樓。 Therefore, we are certain that thirteen female students joined the 1790 poetry gathering at the lake pavilion in the Precious Stone Villa owned by Sun Jiale.

Sun Yunfeng, the organizer of the meeting, wrote about the gathering in her “Preface to Sending off [Yuan Mei] at the Lake Pavilion” (*hulou songbei xu* 湖樓送別序). It more than merely commemorates the event:

The Grand Scribe has the duty of collecting local songs, and the *Zhounan* chapter [in the *Book of Poetry*] abounds with women’s poems. This was why Xiahou instructed the Confucian classics at the court, and Dongpo encountered a famous beauty at the coast. Not to mention that the beautiful scenic spots of West Lake had all been witnessed by earlier people. The *zun* vessel of Beihai has again been opened today.⁵⁹ My teacher, Suiyuan, is age seventy; [even] women and children know of his name. Wherever he goes, “hairpins and skirts” crane their necks [looking forward to see him].⁶⁰ In the *gengxu* year [1790], on the thirteenth day of the fourth moon, [he] halted the cart for sweeping the family tombs then opened the curtain of transmitting the Confucian classics...

夫太史有采風之職，而周南多女子之詩，此夏侯所以授經義于宮中，東坡之所以遇名媛于海上也。况乎西湖之勝，具見前人。北海之樽，重開今日哉。我隨園

⁵⁹ The phrase “*zun* vessel of Beihai” comes from the biography of the Eastern Han scholar Kong Rong 孔融 in *History of Later Han* (*Houhanshu* 後漢書) and speaks of the generosity of Sun Jiale. Kong Rong was a governor of Beihai (modern Shandong); even though his residence was often filled with many guests, the wine in his *zun* vessels was never depleted. Fan Ye 范曄, “Kong Rong zhuan 孔融傳,” in *Houhanshu* 後漢書, *juan* 100 (Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 13a.

⁶⁰ Naming women’s accessories and clothing, the phrase “hairpins and skirts” (*chaiqun* 釵裙) refers to women—likely talented women, given the context of this writing.

夫子行年七十, 婦孺知名. 所到四方, 釵裙引領. 庚戌四月十三日, 因停掃墓之車, 遂啓傳經之帳...⁶¹

This text opens by justifying women's poetry and the interactions between Yuan Mei and his female students. Like the Grand Scribe, who preserved compositions by women, and the Western Han scholar Xiahou Sheng, who served as an educator to the imperial harem, Yuan Mei taught women poetry and circulated their writings.⁶² Like Miss Wen, who admired the great Northern Song scholar Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101, art name: Dongpo), Yuan's female disciples venerated his scholarly achievements.⁶³ In addition to the opportunity of meeting with Yuan Mei, the beautiful scenery of West Lake provided another reason to gather. Sun Jiale followed the precedent set by the late Eastern Han scholar and Beihai governor, Kong Rong 孔融, and generously hosted a poetry gathering at his estate.

Sun Yunfeng's preface goes on to record the scenery of the location and the activities at the gathering, reconstructing the meeting from the perspective of a participant:

⁶¹ Sun Yunfeng, "Hulou songbei xu 湖樓送別序," in Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan*, juan 1, 29.

⁶² When the Han emperor Xuan 宣帝 (r. 74–49 BCE) ascended the throne, the Empress Dowager acted as a regent. To equip her with knowledge of running a country, Xiahou Sheng taught her *Shangshu* 尚書, one of the Confucian classics. Ban Gu, *Hanshu*, 3155.

⁶³ A text prior to Su Shi's "Busuanzi 卜算子" provides the background for this *ci* verse. When Su Shi was demoted to Huizhou 惠州, a beauty surnamed Wen 溫 often listened to Su Shi incanting poems by his window. Mao Jin 毛晉, *Song liushi mingjia ci* 宋六十一名家詞 (Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 50. Yuan Mei writes about this anecdote in the epitaph for Jin Yi, one of his female students, and refers to himself as Su Shi and Jin Yi as Miss Wen. Yuan Mei, "Jin Xianxian nüshi muzhiming 金纖纖女士墓誌銘," in Yuan Mei, "Jin Xianxian mu zhi 金纖纖墓誌", in *Xiaocangshan fang xu wen ji* 小倉山房續文集, juan 32, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 2, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 588.

Feng and others lifted our garments [to show respect], carried [our] bookcases, asked for instruction, and ascended the hall.⁶⁴ A bundle of dry meat had not been presented as a gift [for the teacher], and a thousand hectares of waves [of the lake] were in view.⁶⁵ [We expressed] the unrestrained, secluded feeling through wine and poetry and had an elegant meeting with the old talent. Being the guide of young scholars, [he] does not leave behind those from the inner chamber. Holding tallies and summoning guests, the female disciples substituted for the messenger's labor. Preparing wine and incanting [poetry], the immortal Wuyijun had a gathering at the Manting Peak.⁶⁶ A group of juniors, [though they] lacked the manner of the host, were able to have no misgivings. The Master prepared feasts for the students; does such courtesy exist? At that time, wind and rain could be heard, and mist and wave merged and extended endlessly. Mountain flowers reddened, and the grasses on the embankment were a tangle of green. The Presented Scholars without [their] hair coiled up vied to transmit poems [composed promptly within the time restricted by] the beating of a monk's alms bowl.⁶⁷ Talents with painted eyebrows were particularly gratified by the [story of

⁶⁴ *Kouyi* 摳衣, literally "lifting the front of one's garment," was a gesture to show respect in ancient China. *Chongbian guoyu cidian*, 2057. The word "carry bookcases" (*fuzi* 負笈) alludes to leaving one's home for education. *Chongbian guoyu cidian*, 740.

⁶⁵ The phrase *yishu zhi li wei xiu* 一束之禮未修 is from *shuxiu* 束修, a gift for one's teacher.

⁶⁶ For Wuyijun, see Zhu Xi 朱熹, "Wuyitu xu 武夷圖序," in *Hui'an xiansheng Zhuwengong wenji* 晦菴先生朱文公文集, *juan* 76 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1980), 1343–44. The Manting Peak is the largest peak of Mount Wuyi in Fujian province. Zhang Ju 張榘, "Chongjian huizhenguan ji 重建會真觀記," in *Wuyishan zhi* 武夷山志, *juanzhiwu* 卷之五, edited by Dong Tiangong 董天工 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1971), 393.

⁶⁷ This line refers to a story recorded in the biography of Wang Sengru 王僧孺. A man named Wang Ziliang 王子良 gathered scholars at night and had the gentlemen compose poems. The time allowed for creating a "four-rhyme poem" (*siyunshi* 四韻詩) is limited to the burning of a candle for one Chinese inch. Another man named Xiao Wenyan 蕭文琰 thought that Wang's method was too easy and, with his friends, used instead the beating of a monk's alms bowl to mark the time for poetic composition. Li Yanshou 李延壽, "Liezhuàn dì sishíjiǔ: Jiāng Yān, Rén Fāng, Wáng Sēng rú 列傳第四十九: 江淹, 任昉, 王僧孺," in *Nanshi* 南史, (Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua shuju,

Xie Daoyun] lifting the siege on [Wang Xianzhi's] debate.⁶⁸ [They] either [used] the pearl-like, dense characters to write the *Lingfei Classic* of the Queen Mother of the West or brought out green and gathered together red to paint the flowers and bamboo of Zhongji [Guan Daosheng]...

鳳等摳衣負笈，問字登堂。一束之禮未修，萬頃之波在望。暢幽情於觴詠，雅會耆英。作後學之津梁，不遺閨閣。持符召客，女弟子代使者之勞。置酒歌風，武夷君作幔亭之會。群季乏地主之儀，能無愧也。先生具門人之饌，有是禮乎。其時風雨有聲，烟波無際，山花留紅，堤草縈綠。不櫛進士，競傳擊鉢之詩。掃眉才人，獨逞解圍之辯。或真珠密字，寫王母之靈飛，或吐綠攢紅，畫仲姬之花竹...⁶⁹

According to the text, the 1790 gathering took place on a rainy and windy day; the unsatisfactory weather, however, did not disturb the beauty of the site. Overlooking the surrounding scenery, the participants enjoyed various activities, including feasting, drinking, learning literature, composing poetry, writing calligraphy, and painting. During the event, other guests also visited Yuan Mei, and thus the attendees were not limited to the thirteen female students.

1965), 59.9b. In ancient China, men used *jie* 櫛 to coil their hair up, and thus the phrase *bujie jinshi* 不櫛進士, or “Presented Scholars without [their] hair coiled up,” refers to talented women. *Hanyu dacidian* 漢語大詞典, vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1983), 474.

⁶⁸ The phrase “lifting the siege on [Wang Xianzhi's] debate” (*jiewei zhi bian* 解圍之辯) is from an anecdote about the Eastern Jin female poet Xie Daoyun 謝道韞, who saved Wang Xianzhi 王獻之, her brother-in-law, from a debate he was about to lose. For a translation of the story, see Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, “Ladies, Nuns, and Courtesans,” in *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 139.

⁶⁹ Sun Yunfeng, “Hulou songbei xu 湖樓送別序,” in Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan nüidizi shixuan*, *juan* 1, 29–30.

In 1792, another poetry gathering took place at the same location, and Yuan Mei also recorded the event:

This year, I, at the lake pavilion, invited seven female disciples for a poetry gathering. The prefect, Sir Ming Xizhe [Ming Bao], visited by boat from Qingbo Gate, had tea, and chatted with the ladies for a long time. Knowing that they are talents from the inner chamber of the distinguished families who are in long-standing friendship with him, [he] then left the painted glass boat on which he traveled, embroidered blankets, and beaded curtains for this group of women to use to tour the hills and returned to his office alone by horse. In a little while, [he] had people send over two feasts, seven jade *ruyi* scepters, and objects, including paper, brushes, and fragrant beads, to be given to [those from] the fragrant inner chamber as remuneration.⁷⁰ For a period of time, local gentlemen enviously spread [words of] this elegant affair, for in former days, the prefect Yunting had never done so...⁷¹

今年，余在湖樓招女弟子七人作詩會。太守明希哲先生從清波門打槳見訪，與諸女士茶話良久。知是大家閨秀，與公皆有世誼，乃留所坐玻璃畫船，綉褥珠簾，為群女遊山之用，而獨自騎馬還衙。少頃，遣人送華筵二席，玉如意七支，及

⁷⁰ The word “fragrant beads” (*xiangzhu* 香珠) could mean pearls or beads made of fragrant mud (*xiangni* 香泥) or fragrant wood (*xiangmu* 香木). It was believed that wearing the latter could prevent summer sickness. *Hanyu dacidian*, vol. 12, 429. The term “remuneration” (*runbi* 潤筆) refers to the exchange one made for requesting others’ paintings or calligraphic works. *Chongbian guoyu cidian*, 4399.

⁷¹ The prefect Yunting was E Min 鄂敏 (art name: Yunting 筠亭). Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua buyi*, *juan* 5, 670.

紙筆香珠等物, 分贈香閨為潤筆。一時紳士艷傳韻事, 以為昔日筠亭太守所未有也...⁷²

Though Yuan Mei did not mention the year, this event can be dated to 1792 due to the placement of the text in his *Supplement to Poetry Talks of Harmony Garden* (*Suiyuan shihua buyi* 隨園詩話補遺): it follows an entry on his stay in the West Lake area in the spring of 1792. The second half of this text includes two poems composed at the gathering by Pan Suxin and Sun Yunfeng, documenting their participation.

Yuan Mei wrote a pair of poems about his 1792 trip to Hangzhou; the last four lines of the second poem can be interpreted that he again taught women there:

Thinking of the old days, [I] idly incant a prose-poem by Pan Yue [247–300]. ⁷³	感舊空吟潘岳賦,
Instructing the Confucian classics, [I] again paint a Fu Sheng picture.	傳經又畫伏生圖。
The sisters of the Song family [have] many talents and creativity. ⁷⁴	宋家姐妹多才思,

⁷² Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua buyi*, *juan* 5, 670.

⁷³ The name Pan Yue 潘岳 in the poem could refer to the scholar and government official of the Western Jin dynasty (266–316). Also known as Pan An 潘安, he was popular with women due to his handsome appearance. Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, “Pan Yue 潘岳,” in *Jinshu* 晉書, *juan* 55 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 1507.

⁷⁴ The “sisters of the Song family” were five educated sisters who were invited to positions at the Tang court. The two most erudite ones became palace instructors in the Confucian classics and history and served as consultants to the throne. Mann, *Precious Records*, 81. As Yuan Mei’s note following the last line reveals, this reference was his compliment to Sun Yunfeng and her siblings.

Vying, [they] bring [their] newly composed
poems to query the old man.

(Refer to Biwu and her sisters.)

爭把新詩質老夫。

(謂碧梧姊妹。)⁷⁵

In this poem, Yuan Mei compares himself to the Western Han (206 BCE–9 CE) scholar Fu Sheng, who was believed to protect and relay the Confucian classic, *Shangshu* 尚書, with the assistance of his daughter.⁷⁶ Like Fu Sheng who taught his daughter, Yuan Mei also educated women.

A few poems about the 1792 event by Yuan Mei's female students survive in *Selected Poems from the Female Disciples of the Harmony Garden*. The composition by Sun Yunfeng has a long, descriptive title, indicating the purpose of the meeting and the poem's composition at the gathering: "Master Suiyuan Again Visited Mount Tiantai, Returned, and Called for a Farewell [Gathering] at the Lake Pavilion; [I] Received the *Gui* Character [for Composition]" 隨園先生再游天台歸, 招集湖樓送別, 分得歸字. The poem reads:

A man as hale and hearty as the Master is rarely seen;

先生矍鑠世應稀,

⁷⁵ Yuan Mei, "Dao Hangzhou 到杭州," in *Xiaocangshan fang shiji*, juan 34, 821.

⁷⁶ Emperor Wen (180–157 BCE) of the Western Han dynasty looked for a specialist of *Shangshu* 尚書 and found Fu Sheng, who had hidden this text in the wall when the first emperor of Qin (259–210 BCE) ordered the burning of books. Emperor Wen thus sent one of his officials to learn from Fu Sheng, who was very old. In addition to this official, Fu Sheng also instructed other scholars on *Shangshu*. Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記, juan 121 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 3124–25. For a study on Chinese literati's views on Fu Sheng's daughter and her assistance in transmitting *Shangshu*, see Wing-chung Clara Ho 劉詠聰, "Nüzi yi you gong yan: Fu Sheng nü chuanjing shuo yanjiu 女子亦有功焉: 伏生女傳經說研究," in *Caide xiang hui: Zhongguo nüxing de zhixue yu kezi* 才德相輝: 中國女性的治學與課子 (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 2015), 203–13. Chinese painters, including Du Jin 杜堇 (fl. 1465–1509), captured the scene of Fu Sheng transmitting *Shangshu* in the company of his daughter. Du Jin's painting is in the collection of Metropolitan Museum of Art; the accession number is 1991.117.2. Yuan Mei's admirers also compared him to Fu Sheng. Riegel, "Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1798) and a Different 'Elegant Gathering,'" 99.

Again, from the lake pavilion, [he] set up a draped seat for teaching.	又向湖樓設講帷。
How many times has he come to my hometown, leaning on his walking staff?	鄉井幾回扶杖到，
Twice he went to Tiantai to view the mountains and returned.	天臺兩度看山歸。
[Wang] Xizhi vacated his seat to defer to the elder	羲之虛席推前輩，
(Uncle Wang Menglou referred to the Master as his elder.) ⁷⁷	(王夢樓年伯呼先生為 前輩。)
Elder Po left [his] boat to drift in the evening sun. ⁷⁸	坡老留船泛夕暉。
(At that time, [we] drifted in Prefect Ming's painted boat.)	(時泛明太守畫船。)
Once more, [he] pointed to forests and mountains and agreed on next year.	更指林巒約來歲，
In the breeze, the osmanthus flowers seem to curtsey.	桂花風裡好搵衣。 ⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Sun Yunfeng called Wang Wenzhi *nianbo* 年伯, a term suggesting that her father and Wang received the Presented Scholar degree in the same year. *Chongbian guoyu cidian*, 1327.

⁷⁸ This line possibly compares Ming Bao to the famous scholar Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101, art name: Dongpo) because Su served as a Hangzhou official during the years of 1071–74 and 1089–91. For Su Shi and Hangzhou, see Yan Jy-Ing 顏智英, “Cong diyu wenhua kan Su Shi ci de Hangzhou wenhua shuxie 從地域文化看蘇軾詞的杭州書寫,” *Wen yu zhe* 文與哲 16 (June 2010): 237–82.

⁷⁹ Sun Yunfeng, “Suiyuan xiansheng zaiyou Tiantai gui, zhaoji hulou songbie, fende gui zi 隨園先生再游天台歸, 招集湖樓送別, 分得歸字,” in Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan*, *juan* 1, 26.

Sun Yunfeng did not provide a date, but similar information found in Yuan Mei's earlier text dates this poem to 1792. The writing records the attendance of the prefect Ming Bao (art name: Xizhe) and the scholar Wang Wenzhi (art name: Menglou); the latter was responsible for one colophon and the title panel of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll. Recognizing Wang's achievement in calligraphy, Sun Yunfeng compared him to the famous Eastern Jin calligrapher, Wang Xizhi (303–61) by referring to him as Xizhi.

Sun Yunhe, another disciple and a younger sister of Sun Yunfeng, attended the same meeting and composed a poem with a similar title: “Master Suiyuan Again Visited Mt. Tiantai, Returned, and Called for a Farewell [Gathering] at the Lake Pavilion; When the Rhyme was Assigned, [I] Received the *Lin* Character [for Composition]” 隨園先生再游天台歸，招集湖樓送別，分韻得臨字. The poem reads:

For ten years, the dream about Mount Tiantai,	十載天台夢，
The Master already again sought.	先生已重尋。
Mist and evening clouds welcomed [his] walking staff and shoes.	烟霞迎杖履，
Apes and cranes recognize [his] books and <i>qin</i> .	猿鶴認書琴。
To grasp the beautiful scenery, [he] relied on both eyes.	攬勝憑雙目，
To transmit the Confucian classics, [he] arrived at the old forest.	傳經到故林。

At this pavilion, [we] once had a banquet gathering.	斯樓曾宴集，
Today, [we] again ascend [it] to view far from on high.	此日復登臨。
(In the <i>gengxu</i> year [1790], when the Master came to Hangzhou, also on this day, [we] banqueted in this pavilion.)	(庚戌先生來 杭，亦以是日 宴于此樓。)
Floating water fringes are contained in the fragrant pond.	浮苻涵芳沼，
Remaining flowers decorate the green shade.	餘花綴綠陰。
[His] former visit is still clearly [remembered by us];	舊游還歷歷，
[His] disciples have increased.	弟子更森森。
(Pan and Qian, two female historians, newly receive instruction.)	(潘錢兩女史 新受業。)
During his lecture, they asked about his rare [knowledge];	講席奇方問，
[At the farewell banquet,] as we were [preparing to] leave the banquet, the wine was poured again.	離筵酒又斟。

The instructor composed on the cut willow
branch.⁸⁰

教人歌折柳，

The audience sketched the pear-leaved
crabapple.

看客寫來禽。

(At that time, Uncle Menglou was present and
wrote calligraphy.)⁸¹

(時夢樓年伯
在座作書。)⁸²

...

This poem opens with Yuan Mei's trip to Mount Tiantai and arrival at Hangzhou. After remembering the 1790 gathering at the same location, the text records the participation of Pan Suxin and Qian Lin—identified as two new students of Yuan Mei—and Wang Wenzhi, Yuan's literati friend.

Wang Wenzhi mentions his attendance of the 1792 event in his colophon for the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll:

At Precious Stone Villa unfolding a red curtain,

寶石山莊啓絳幃，

Spring waves, for ten *li*, ripple like green glass.

春波十里漾琉璃。

Escaping into Chan [Buddhism], the weary guest
escaping is really fortunate.

逃禪倦客真僥倖，

⁸⁰ The word *zheliu* 折柳 refers to parting. *Hanyu dacidian*, vol. 6, 378.

⁸¹ As shown in the portraits of Luo Qilan discussed in chapter 6, Wang Wenzhi transcribed poems for his acquaintances. Thus, this note could record Wang's activity of transcribing the poems by the gathering participants.

⁸² Sun Yunhe, "Suiyuan xiansheng zaiyou Tiantai gui, zhaoji hulou songbie fenyun de lin zi 隨園先生再遊天台歸，招集湖樓送別，分韻得臨字，" in Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan nüdzizi shixuan*, *juan* 3, 82.

To have witnessed in person, the moment of
seeking instructions at the lake pavilion.

親見湖樓問業時。

The phrase “unfolding a red curtain” refers to the instruction of Yuan Mei, and the “weary guest” stands for Wang Wenzhi; following the poem, Wang explains that he visited Yuan Mei at the lake pavilion when the 1792 gathering was held and met Yuan’s female disciples.⁸³

Both Qian Lin and Pan Suxin confirmed their participation in the 1792 meeting in their writings. Qian Lin devoted her poem to Yuan Mei’s travels, literary achievements, and acceptance of female disciples.⁸⁴ Pan Suxin’s writing includes many notes on the details of the event.⁸⁵ According to Pan: “[Having] a poetry gathering with talents from the inner chamber, among the fifteen [invited] individuals, seven came” 詩會閨秀十五人來者七人. She portrayed Yuan Mei as a generous teacher, as “the Master ordered and distributed paper, brushes, and ink for talents from the inner chamber to chant poems” 先生製閨秀吟詩紙筆墨分貽. Pan also recorded the attendance of Wang Wenzhi and Ming Bao: “Wang Menglou, a [Presented Scholar of the rank] *tanhua*, wrote on a fan; Prefect Ming bestowed a feast” 王夢樓探花書扇; 明太守贈筵. “The prefect rode a boat to the lake villa, returned by palanquin, and left [the boat for] us to tour the lake” 太守坐船至湖莊, 肩輿而歸, 留吾輩遊湖; in addition, he “gifted various objects, including jade *ruyi* scepters and ink stones made in Duanxi” 貽玉如意端硯等物. A poetry

⁸³ The metaphor of a red curtain is derived from the biography of the Eastern Han scholar Ma Rong 馬融. Fan Ye 范曄, “Ma Rong liezhuan di wushi shang 馬融列傳第五十上,” in *Houhanshu* 後漢書, *juan* 90, *shang* 上 (Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 12a.

⁸⁴ Qian Lin, “Suiyuan xiansheng zaiyou Tiantai er gui, zhaoji hulou zuobie, fende shanzi 隨園先生再遊天台而歸, 招集湖樓作別, 分得山字,” in Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan*, *juan* 4, 94.

⁸⁵ The information in this paragraph is drawn from Pan Suxin, “Hulou jishi cheng Suiyuan fuzi 湖樓即事呈隨園夫子,” in Yuan Mei, *Xu tongren ji, guixiu lei*, 230–31.

competition possibly took place at the meeting, as “the Master, when discussing poetry, ranked Sun Biwu as the first and Suxin as the second” 先生論詩以孫碧梧為首，以素心為次。

The gathering’s participants shown in the larger painting of *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll are not the same as those recorded in the above writings. The picture depicts sixteen individuals: thirteen female students, Yuan Mei, his relative Dai Lanying, and her young son. However, according to the textual accounts of the 1792 meeting, there were ten attendees: Yuan Mei, seven female students—including Sun Yunfeng, Sun Yunhe, Pan Suxin, and Qian Lin—and his male acquaintances, Wang Wenzhi and Ming Bao. Pan Suxin, Wang Wenzhi, and Ming Bao are absent from both paintings in the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll, and Qian Lin is depicted in the smaller painting, not the gathering scene. Moreover, instead of depicting every recorded activity, the painters of the scroll focused on the scholarly pursuits commonly shown in “elegant-gathering pictures”; excluded from the picture are the activities of boating, feasting, drinking, gift-giving, and discussing the women’s poems following the competition. Therefore, the larger painting is not a literal representation of the 1792 gathering.

Conclusion

Born in an era that was more receptive to female writers and painters, Yuan Mei grew up surrounded by educated female relatives and developed a lifelong interest in helping talented women. Despite conservative social norms and criticism, he advocated women’s freedom to compose poetry, interacted with some of them through personal meetings and written communication, and became their teacher later in his life. In 1796, eager to promote his female students, Yuan Mei published *Selected Poems from the Female Disciples of the Harmony*

Garden and ordered the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll.⁸⁶ His assistance of and delight in his female students may have directed the painting toward a more preferable representation, one that transformed an event including both men and women and a variety of activities into an elegant gathering with a larger number of strictly female students. The painting's exclusion of the male participants of the actual event encouraged viewers to focus on Yuan Mei and the women as educated writers and artists. It also promoted the interpretation that his many interactions with them were based on his appreciation of their scholarly abilities. In addition, as gender segregation was still common practice among the Qing-period upper class, the removal of the male participants from a pictorial record of the event made the picture less scandalous to conservative viewers.

⁸⁶ For the publication date of *Selected Poems from the Female Disciples of the Harmony Garden*, see Jerry D. Schmidt, "Yuan Mei (1716–98) on Women," 146–47.

Chapter Three: Elegant Gatherings and the Artistic Sources for the Main Painting in the *Thirteen Female Disciples Scroll*

To provide an art-historical context for the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll, this chapter examines the larger picture as a feminine version of the traditionally male “elegant-gathering painting” (*yajitu* 雅集圖). I begin with an introduction to the tradition of “elegant gatherings” (*yaji* 雅集) and a brief consideration of classical precedents.¹ To identify possible sources and artistic inspirations, I then examine specific visual elements in the larger painting, including the composition and the poses of the figures, and relate the picture to other paintings of elegant gatherings and portraits of male scholars. I also look at some feminine variations on the theme to consider the possibility that some artistic choices in the portrayals of Yuan Mei’s students were made due to the gender of the subjects.

3.1 Characteristics of Elegant Gatherings

The elegant gathering was one of the most popular social activities of literati throughout Chinese history. These meetings, with like-minded individuals engaging in scholarly activities in a garden or scenic spot, provided temporary retreat from daily routines and duties. They also enabled the participants to extend their social circles beyond their families and coworkers. Yuan Mei, as a famous poet active in the Jiangnan area, hosted and attended many elegant gatherings

¹ Regarding the terminology: the character *ya* 雅 can mean *elegant*, *graceful*, *refined*, and *cultured*. Art historians typically use the translation *elegant* to describe the literati social gatherings. *Ya* also appears in the compounds *wenya* 文雅 and *ruya* 儒雅. When used to describe a person, the former refers to the individual’s elegance and cultivation in literature, the latter to a person’s scholarly disposition. Thus, I use *wenya* as an adjective, rendering it as *refine*, and *ruya* as a noun, translating it as *scholarly gracefulness*.

in his Harmony Garden, at famous scenic spots, and on the properties of his acquaintances such as the garden estate owned by his friend Sun Jiale.²

Chinese literati often recorded or commemorated the social activities they enjoyed with friends or colleagues in writing. These compositions, surviving as printed texts, provide insights into the nature of the elegant gatherings. For example, the Ming aristocrat Zhu Chengyong 朱誠泳 (1458–98), wrote “Preface to *Picture of an Elegant Gathering on the Lantern Festival; Composed at Zhen’an Residence*” 元宵雅集圖序時在鎮安邸作 for a painting commemorating a meeting that he hosted.³ In this text, Zhu used the character *ya* 雅 a few times to describe the event. As recorded, among the “refined guests” (*wenya ke* 文雅客) were skilled writers. As for one gentleman named Liao Tingxi 廖廷璽, “even though he was a military official, he was also able to venerate scholarly gracefulness (*ruya*) and loved writing” 雖為武將, 亦能尊尚儒雅而愛文墨. According to Zhu, since the gathering was “free from the dusty and vulgar air of the time, it was truly an elegant meeting” 無時世塵俗氣, 誠雅會也. To be called elegant, an event required participants of refined cultivation and a graceful atmosphere. In the two poetry gatherings of Yuan Mei and his female students, the public identities of the participants as writers and the refined air they created qualified the events to be elegant gatherings.

² Yuan Mei’s contemporaries wrote about the gatherings they attended in Yuan’s Harmony Garden, and these poems are under the category of “Yanji lei 宴集類,” in Yuan Mei, *Xu tongren ji* 續同人集, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 6, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 65–86. Examples of the meetings of Yuan Mei and Qing scholars at scenic spots include a gathering for purification at the Red Bridge in Yangzhou. The participants included Yuan Mei, Wang Wenzhi 王文治 (a friend of Yuan Mei), Luo Qilan 駱綺蘭 (a student of Yuan Mei and Wang Wenzhi), and Zuo Lancheng 左蘭成 (a cousin of Luo Qilan). The poems composed by Yuan Mei and Wang Wenzhi at the gathering can be found in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan* 聽秋軒贈言, *juan* 2, in *Jiangnan nüxing bieji* 江南女性別集, *erbian shangce* 二編上冊, ed. Hu Xiaoming 胡曉明 and Peng Guozhong 彭國忠 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2010), 757.

³ Zhu Chengyong, “Yuanxiao yajitu xu shizai zhen’an di zuo 元宵雅集圖序時在鎮安邸作,” in *Xiaoming gao* 小鳴稿, (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1971), 9.17b–9.19a.

The meeting locations also served to separate attendees from the everyday world. The gentlemen often met outdoors at scenic spots outside a city or on private estates, in particular those with attached gardens. A classic example is the Orchid Pavilion in Shaoxing, in Zhejiang province, the site of the famous 353 CE gathering recorded by Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–61 CE) in his “Orchid Pavilion Preface.”⁴ As recorded by Wang, the Orchid Pavilion was built near a stream in a beautiful setting, surrounded by mountains, hills, groves, and bamboo. The Western Garden in Kaifeng, which belonged to Wang Shen 王詵 (born 1036), an imperial son-in-law, was reportedly the site of a famous eleventh-century gathering attended by such distinguished Northern Song literati as Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), Li Gonglin 李公麟 (1049–1106), and Mi Fu 米芾 (1052–1107). None of the probable participants wrote about this particular garden owned by Wang Shen.⁵ However, in later literary imaginations, the garden featured a stream, garden rocks and furniture, and various plants with scholarly symbols.⁶

A later example is the Apricot Garden of Yang Rong 楊榮 (1371–1440) in Beijing, where nine high-ranking Ming officials and a court painter met in 1437 amid apricot blossoms.⁷ According to one participant, Yang Shiqi 楊士奇 (1364–1444), the garden also featured woods,

⁴ This meeting is often referred to as the Orchid Pavilion Gathering. It was a spring purification rite performed by a group of elite men of the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420). For an introduction to the event and English translation of the “Orchid Pavilion Preface,” see Richard E. Strassberg, “Wang Hsi-chih (ca. 303–ca. 361): *Preface to Collected Poems from the Orchid Pavilion*,” in *Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writing from Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California, 1994), 65–6.

⁵ Ellen Johnston Laing, “Real or Ideal: The Problem of the ‘Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden’ in Chinese Historical and Art Historical Records,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88.3 (July–Sept., 1968), 425.

⁶ The garden elements are drawn from a writing attributed to Mi Fu, as many later painters derived artistic inspirations from this text. Mi Fu, “Xiyuan yajitu ji 西園雅集圖記,” in *Baojin yingguan ji 寶晉英光集* (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1971), 153–55. For a translation in English, see Ellen Johnston Laing, “Scholars and Sages: A Study in Chinese Figure Painting” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1967), 37–9.

⁷ For an English translation of Yang Rong’s postface that records the information of the gathering, see Maxwell K. Hearn, “An Early Ming Example of Multiples: Two Versions of *Elegant Gathering in the Apricot Garden*,” in *Issues of Authenticity in Chinese Painting* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999), 221–23. According to Sun Chengze 孫承澤 (1592–1676), a later Ming scholar, the Apricot Garden was in Beijing. Sun Chengze, *Chunming mengyu lu 春明夢餘錄* (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1976), 65.7b.

a spring, and rocks.⁸ The two gatherings of Yuan Mei and his female disciples similarly took place in a garden in Sun Jiale's Precious Stone Villa.⁹ This walled, private property sheltered the attendees from its bustling urban location so that they could enjoy nature in miniature and concentrate on their literary and artistic creations. According one student, Sun Yunhe, within this garden were flowers, shady trees, and a fragrant pond.¹⁰ As recorded by another disciple, Sun Yunfeng, the villa was surrounded by hills, a lake, mist, and willows—components of the beautiful scenery of the West Lake area.¹¹

Scholarly activities, as measures of one's cultivation, also made meetings elegant in the eyes of Chinese literati.¹² Prime among the activities of elegant gatherings was poetry, typically spurred by assignments to the participants, including: a subject, such as the “fragrance of wine” (*jiuxiang* 酒香); a single character, like *ran* 染 (to dye, spread, or infuse); or a rhyme scheme.¹³ Occasionally, the composing of poetry was incorporated into a competition or game, such as the

⁸ Yang Shiqi, “Xingyuan yaji xu 杏園雅集序,” in *Dongli xuji* 東里續集 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1977), 15.28a.

⁹ For the 1790 gathering, see Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua buyi* 隨園詩話補遺, *juan* 1, in *Yuan Mei quan ji* 袁枚全集, vol. 3, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 553. For the 1792 gathering, see Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua buyi*, *juan* 5, 670.

¹⁰ Sun Yunhe 孫雲鶴, “Suiyuan xiansheng zaiyou Tiantai gui, zhaoji hulou songbie, fenyun de lin zi 隨園先生再遊天台歸, 招集湖樓送別, 分韻得臨字,” in Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan* 隨園女弟子詩選, *juan* 3, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 7, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 82.

¹¹ Sun Yunfeng 孫雲鳳, “Hulou qingyetu xu 湖樓請業圖序,” in Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan*, *juan* 1, 28.

¹² Yuan Mei shared this perspective and used the term *fengya* (風雅, “refinement”), that contains the *ya* character, in a series of two poems on a meeting of literati pursuits: “[I] revisited Lijiang and imprinted [my] traces; [I] did not intend to pursue refinement [but] encountered various gentlemen” 重到灘江印雪鴻; 不圖風雅遇諸公. Yuan Mei, *Xiaocangshan fang shiji* 小倉山房詩集, *juan* 30, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 1, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 713. In this “literary banquet” (*wenyan* 文宴), the scholarly pursuits he enjoyed with his friends included transcribing poems and making ink rubbings of ancient steles.

¹³ Examples include a Yuan-dynasty work, “[At] Elegant Gathering in the Meixue Studio, [When] Assigning Subject, [I] Received ‘Fragrance of Wine,’” and a Ming work, “[In the] Second Month of Spring, [I Attended an] Elegant Gathering, [and Upon] Assigning Rhyme, [I] Received the ‘Ran’ Character.” Zhang Yu 張雨, “Meixuezhai yaji fenti de jiuxiang 梅雪齋雅集分題得酒香,” in *Juqu waishi ji* 句曲外史集, reprinted in *Yuanshi xuan* 元詩選, *xia* 下 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1967), 16b. Tao An 陶安, “Zhongchun yaji fenyun de ran zi 仲春雅集分韻得染字,” in *Taoxueshi ji* 陶學士集, *juan* 1, reprinted in *Chengyibo wenji: wai sanzong* 誠意伯文集: 外三種 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991), 577–78.

one at the Orchid Pavilion Gathering.¹⁴ At the 1792 gathering at Sun Jiale's lake pavilion, Yuan Mei's female students composed poetry in such a contest: Sun Yunfeng was assigned the character *gui* 歸 (to return),¹⁵ Sun Yunhe was assigned *lin* 臨 (to draw near or approach),¹⁶ and Qian Lin was assigned *shan* 山 (mountain).¹⁷ Yuan Mei reviewed their compositions and awarded first place to Sun Yunfeng.¹⁸

Inspiring literary and artistic creations throughout Chinese history, wine was a typical component of a feast provided to the guests of a gathering. In a poetry game, a drink might be required as a pleasant punishment for those unable to compose in a timely manner. During the Orchid Pavilion Gathering, wine cups were floated downstream, and participants who did not finish their poems had to drink from a cup floating by.¹⁹ In 1463, an elegant gathering took place in North Villa 北庄, a property owned by a Ming official named Zhang Quan 張銓; there, the participants indulged themselves with a feast and wine and produced many compositions.²⁰ According to a preface Sun Yunfeng wrote for the 1790 gathering, drinking was also enjoyed by Yuan Mei and his female disciples.²¹

¹⁴ Strassberg, "Wang Hsi-chih (ca. 303–ca. 361)," 63.

¹⁵ Sun Yunfeng's poem is titled: "[When] Master Suiyuan Again Returned from His Trip to Mount Tiantai and Called for A Farewell Gathering in the Lake Pavilion, Upon Assigning Rhyme, [I] Received the *Gui* Character." Sun Yunfeng, "Suiyuan xiansheng zaiyou Tiantai gui, zhaoji hulou songbie, fende gui zi 隨園先生再遊天台歸, 招集湖樓送別, 分得歸字," in Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan*, 26.

¹⁶ Sun Yunhe, "Suiyuan xiansheng zaiyou Tiantai gui, zhaoji hulou songbie fenyun de lin zi 隨園先生再遊天台歸, 招集湖樓送別分韻得臨字," in Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan*, *juan* 3, 82–3.

¹⁷ Qian Lin, "Suiyuan xiansheng zaiyou Tiantai gui, zhaoji hulou zuobie, fende shan zi 隨園先生再遊天台歸, 招集湖樓作別, 分得山字," in Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan*, *juan* 4, 94.

¹⁸ Another participant Pan Suxin recorded that Yuan Mei ranked Sun Yunfeng's poem the first and hers the second in "Hulou jishi cheng Suiyuan fuzi 湖樓即事呈隨園夫子." Yuan Mei included this writing in his *Xu tongren ji*, *guixiu lei* 閨秀類, 230.

¹⁹ Strassberg, "Wang Hsi-chih (ca. 303–ca. 361)," 63.

²⁰ The Ming scholar Ni Qian 倪謙 (active 15th century) wrote a preface to this collection of writing. Ni Qian, "Beizhuang yajishi xu 北庄雅集詩序," in *Ni Wenxi ji* 倪文僖集 (Taipei: Shangwu, 1982), 21.17b.

²¹ Sun Yunfeng, "Hulou songbei xu 湖樓送別序," in Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan*, *juan* 1, 29–30.

Recorded in texts and represented in paintings, other activities of elegant gatherings included painting, writing calligraphy, playing the strategy game *weiqi*, and engaging in philosophical conversations. The participants also appreciated art works and antiquities, played string instruments or listened to music played by others, and enjoyed the surrounding scenery and the fragrance of flowers, tea, and incense. Such pleasures inspired numerous literary compositions and artistic creations. Since these pursuits required leisure and money to cultivate, as well as access to gardens that cost a fortune to purchase and maintain, the participants were typically members of the elite class of scholars and government officials. Many of the female attendees of the poetry gatherings at Sun's lake pavilion also belonged to affluent families, who were financially able and willing to educate them.

Certain legendary gatherings, most notably the Orchid Pavilion Gathering of 353 CE and the Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden of the Northern Song period, were the enduring models for such events. Literati of later periods often elevated their own gatherings by comparing them to such classical precedents.²² Yuan Mei was an admirer of the Orchid Pavilion Gathering; he visited sites and wrote poems related to the event and to Wang Xizhi.²³ He also attended a meeting for purification at the place the Orchid Pavilion Gathering was believed to

²² The Ming scholar Gu Lin 顧璘 (1476–1545) composed a poem on a gathering he attended: “[the gathering is like the] Orchid Pavilion Gathering that did not have [the vulgar music produced by] string and wind instruments; [it is also similar to the] Gathering in the Jingu Garden that was abound in literary compositions” 蘭亭絕絲竹; 金谷盛文賦. Gu Lin, “Wuzhuting yaji de shu zi 梧竹亭雅集得樹字,” in *Xiyuan cunqao shi* 息園存稿詩, *juan* 3, reprinted in *Xiyuan cunqao* 息園存稿, vol. 3 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1976), 6a. The Western Jin scholar Shi Chong 石崇 (249–300) owned the Jingu Garden, where he and his guests enjoyed various literati activities, and those who were unable to compose poems had to drink wine as a form of punishment. Shi Chong's text on the gatherings is in the “Pinzao dijiu 品藻第九” chapter in Yu Jiayi 余嘉錫, *Shishuo xinyu shuding* 世說新語疏訂 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 530.

²³ The two poems, “Orchid Pavilion” and “Wang Youjun (Wang Xizhi) Temple 王右軍祠,” are in Yuan Mei, *Xiaocangshan fang shiji*, *juan* 26, 552.

have occurred.²⁴ To compliment Yuan Mei, Zhang Yun'ao 張雲璈 (1722–1804), in his colophon for the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll, compared Yuan's preface, or the first colophon, to Mi Fu's "Western Garden Record."²⁵

3.2 Paintings of Elegant Gatherings

The popularity and long history of elegant gatherings resulted in the creation of many paintings of such events, and the subject became a common subgenre of figure painting. Scholars commissioned or personally created pictures of the meetings they admired, imagined, or attended. Owning, creating, or inscribing paintings of classic elegant gatherings expressed not only respect for the famous events and participants but also one's elegant inclinations. Such participation with these paintings also showed a gentleman's knowledge of the past and his aspiration to take the extraordinary subjects as personal models. The classic examples, the Orchid Pavilion Gathering and the Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden, were painted frequently.²⁶ As a result, the iconography of these two events became very familiar. A scene of drinking gentlemen arrayed along a riverbank, with wine cups floating by, would be immediately recognized as the former event; the latter would be identified by a scene of men in a garden,

²⁴ The gathering took place in 1793, and the host was a government official named Li Hengte 李亨特. Qian Yong 錢泳, "Lanting 蘭亭," in *Liyuan conghua* 履園叢話 (Taipei: Xinxing shuju, 1960), 18.19b–18.20a.

²⁵ Zhang Yun'ao wrote: "The painting is like the *Realized Spirits Picture* that depicts the ranks [of Daoist deities], and the preface is like the "Western Garden Record" that records the Elegant Gathering [in the Western Garden]" 畫如真靈圖位業; 序如西園記雅集. The *Realized Spirits Picture* is a work by Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536), a Daoist active in the Six Dynasties period (265–589). Similar to Yuan Mei, Tao Hongjing was also a native of modern Nanjing. For information on Tao Hongjing, see Li Yanshou 李延壽, *Nanshi* 南史, *juan* 76 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 1897–1900. The "Western Garden Record" is believed to be a text by Mi Fu 米芾 (1052–1107), one of the participants of the Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden. Mi Fu, "Xiyuan yajitu ji," 153–55.

²⁶ Published examples include two scrolls in the collection of the Shanghai Museum: *Purification Festival at the Orchid Pavilion* by an anonymous Ming painter and *Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden* by Shitao 石濤 (1642–1707). For reproductions, see catalogue numbers 3 and 28 in Shane McCausland and Ling Lizhong, *Telling Images of China: Narrative and Figure Paintings, 15th–20th Century from the Shanghai Museum* (London: Scala, 2010).

occupied by painting, writing calligraphy, inscribing a rock, explaining Buddhist doctrine, and playing a musical instrument, the *ruan*. Therefore, without the aid of titles or inscriptions, most well-educated people could identify the subjects of such paintings.

The Five Dynasties (907–60) handscroll, *Female Immortals in the Fairyland* 閨苑女仙 (fig. 3.1), might also be considered an elegant-gathering painting despite its imaginary subject, for it depicts a group of women engaging in various literati pastimes in a landscape setting.²⁷ On an island in the center of the composition, elaborately dressed women—one writing, one viewing a scroll, and one playing the *ruan*—are in the company of attendants. Whether or not the picture represents a particular story or legend is uncertain, as such information is absent from the colophons and early texts that record this work.²⁸ However, as a scene of educated women gathered in a landscape, it is a rare early precedent for *Thirteen Female Disciples*.

Chinese literati often commissioned or created paintings of the gatherings they attended. The Ming court painter Xie Huan 謝環 (ca. 1370–ca. 1450) documented Yang Rong’s gathering of 1437 in a composition known as *Elegant Gathering in the Apricot Garden* 杏園雅集 (fig. 3.2).²⁹ *Gathering for Birthday Celebration in the Bamboo Garden* 竹園壽集 (fig. 3.3), a collaborative work by Lü Ji 呂紀 (died 1504 or 1505) and Lü Wenying 呂文英 (1488–1505),

²⁷ *Female Immortals in the Fairyland* is attributed to Ruan Gao 阮郜 (active 10th century) and is in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing. For a reproduction, see Gugong bowuyuan 故宫博物院, *Zhongguo lidai huihua: Gugong bowuyuan canghua ji* 中国历代绘画: 故宫博物院藏画集, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1978), 80–3.

²⁸ The work is referred to as a “Picture of Female Immortals” (*nüxian tu* 女仙圖) or “Picture of Female Immortals in the Fairyland” (*langyuan nüxian tu* 閨苑女仙圖). Gugong bowuyuan, *Zhongguo lidai huihua*, 14.

²⁹ The composition now survives as two handscroll paintings and one printed book. One handscroll is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the other is in the Zhenjiang Museum. The book is in the collection of the Library of Congress. For reproductions of these three, see Maxwell K. Hearn, “An Early Ming Example of Multiples: Two Versions of *Elegant Gathering in the Apricot Garden*,” in *Issues of Authenticity in Chinese Painting*, ed. Judith G. Smith and Wen C. Fong (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999), 224–25.

shows a meeting attended by the painters and patrons in 1499.³⁰ Yuan Mei commissioned two compositions, *Elegant Gathering in the Harmony Garden* 隨園雅集 (fig. 3.4) and *Thirteen Female Disciples Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion*, which represent him enjoying scholarly pastimes in the company of male and female contemporaries.³¹ Therefore, works from this category reflect personal participation in and observation of the meetings.

Some paintings of elegant gatherings mixed actual events with imaginary content. For example, *Gathering of Ten Officials [Who Received the Presented-Scholar Degree] in the Jiashen Year* 甲申十同年會圖 (fig. 3.5) shows a gathering of Ming officials in the residence of Min Gui 閔珪 (1430–1511); though Jiao Fang 焦芳 (1435–1517) is included in the painting, he apparently was on a diplomatic trip and did not attend the meeting, according to another participant, Li Dongyang 李東陽 (1447–1516).³² The painting's role in conveying the friendship of these ten men likely explains Jiao Fang's inclusion. The larger painting in the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll also mixed the representation of a historical gathering with Yuan Mei's embellishments and modifications. As discussed in chapter 2, only seven students attended this meeting. Moreover, Yuan Mei's male acquaintances, Wang Wenzhi and Ming Bao, were also present but were not represented in the painting. Yuan Mei's pride in and promotion of his

³⁰ This painting records a birthday celebration for three prominent Ming officials that took place at the rear garden attached to an estate of Zhou Jing 周經. My translation of the work comes from the title panel in the handscroll. For the information on this gathering, see Wu Kuan, "Zhuyuan shouji xu 竹園壽集序," in *Paoweng jiacang ji* 匏翁家藏集 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1922), 45.6b–45.8a. The handscroll is in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing. For reproductions, see Li He, et al., *Power and Glory: Court Arts of China's Ming Dynasty* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 2008), 219–21. In this publication, the painting is called *Elegant Gathering in the Bamboo Garden*.

³¹ According to the late Qing scholar Luo Zhenchang 羅振常, the original painting of *Elegant Gathering in the Harmony Garden* was lost. Luo Zhenchang, "Suiyuan yaji tu tiyong xu 隨園雅集圖題詠序," in *Suiyuan yajitu tiyong yijuan* 隨園雅集圖題詠一卷, reprinted in *Congshu jicheng xubian* 叢書集成續編, vol. 155 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1994), 49. See page 51 for the surviving print of the composition.

³² Li Dongyang, "Jiashen shitongnian shixu 甲申十同年詩序," in *Huailutang wen hou gao* 懷麓堂文後稿, *juan* 3, reprinted in *Huailutang gao* 懷麓堂稿, vol. 5 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1975), 2398.

female students likely contributed to the decision to depict the event as an elegant gathering of women, with a greater number of participants than were present at the actual event.

Paintings of some elegant gatherings were created in multiple copies to serve as mementos for the participants. In an inscription for a version of *Elegant Gathering in the Apricot Garden*, the Ming scholar Li Dongyang wrote of viewing other copies owned by the descendants of the gathering's attendees.³³ In the preface written for *Gathering for Birthday Celebration in the Bamboo Garden*, Wu Kuan 吳寬 (1435–1504) recorded the creation of multiples for each participant.³⁴ This practice immortalized not only the events but also the friendships of the gentlemen, and the copies then became tokens of membership in the elite societies depicted in these paintings. As indicated by Yuan Mei's grandson, Yuan Zuzhi 袁祖志 (1827–98), the Yuan family originally had two handscroll paintings called *Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion*.³⁵ Unfortunately, Yuan Zuzhi's text does not clearly indicate why they were made or if they were identical.

3.3 Artistic Sources and Variations: Composition, Iconographies, and Gender

The compositional and iconographical features of the larger painting in the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll recall not only paintings of elegant gatherings but also group and individual portraits of Chinese literati. Often, handscroll paintings of elegant gatherings begin with arriving figures who move toward the left, as if inviting the viewer to proceed with them to the main event, which is usually near the center of the composition and is revealed as the scroll is

³³ Li Dongyang, "Shu xingyuan yaji tujuan hou 書杏園雅集圖卷後," in *Huailutang wen hou gao 懷麓堂文後稿*, *juan* 13, 2822.

³⁴ Wu Kuan, "Zhuyuan shouji xu," 45.8a.

³⁵ Yuan Zuzhi, *Suiyuan suoji 隨園瑣記*, reprinted in *Congshu jicheng sanbian 叢書集成三編*, vol. 76 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1997), 113.

unrolled. *Composing Poetry on a Spring Outing* (fig. 3.6), attributed to the Southern Song (1127–1279) master Ma Yuan 馬遠 (active before 1189–after 1225), employs this scheme.³⁶ The scroll opens with figures traveling via a pack train of donkeys and a ferryboat. A bit farther on, passing a pavilion in which a boy is resting, a scholar and his servant walk leftward, about to cross a bridge over a river. On the other side of the bridge is the main scene: a group gathers around a calligrapher at a table beneath pines. The larger painting in the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll also begins with the arrival of figures, a pair of women identified in Yuan Mei's first colophon as the daughters of Sun Jiale, the owner of the lake pavilion. Beyond the stairs, to the left, is their destination: a terrace protected by a balustrade, where the participants are enjoying various scholarly activities.

In these paintings, the figures are usually organized into groups engaged in particular pastimes, with one person or an activity as a group's focus. Typical depictions of the *Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden* follow Mi Fu's "Western Garden Record" in the grouping of the participants and emphasize scholarly activities, including Su Shi writing, Li Gonglin painting, and Mi Fu inscribing a rock.³⁷ The officials in *Gathering for Birthday Celebration in the Bamboo Garden* are similarly arranged, with Tu Yong 屠瀟 ready to inscribe a bamboo stem, Wu Kuan writing, and Lü Ji and Lü Wenying viewing a hanging scroll.³⁸ Focusing on literati pastimes emphasizes the cultivation of the attendees; moreover, the presence of surrounding spectators implies exchanges between the individuals and suggests an intellectual community.

³⁶ This painting is in the collection of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. For reproductions, see: William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts and Ho Wai-kam, *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting: The Collections of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, and the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Cleveland, OH: Cleveland Museum of Art in cooperation with Indiana University Press, 1980), 67–8.

³⁷ Mi Fu, "Xiyuan yajitu ji," 153–55.

³⁸ For the activities at the gathering and the grouping of the officials, see Wu Kuan, "Zhuyuan shouji xu," 45.7b–45.8a.

The figures in the larger painting of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll are likewise separated into groups, four of which focus on a person engaging in a scholarly pastime: Xi Peilan plays *qin* while Xu Yuxin sits nearby and listens; Wang Shen inscribes a banana leaf while Yan Ruizhu and a maid observe Wang's artistic improvisation; Liao Yunjin paints a cut flower branch while Qu Bingyun gazes at Liao's work; Yuan Mei, in the company of Dai Lanying and her son, sits in the pavilion, ready to write. These arrangements highlight the students' scholarly abilities and encourage the viewer's interpretation of them as artists and writers.

In paintings of elegant gatherings, the most important figures are often surrounded by the most attendants, objects, garden features, and architectural elements, to clearly indicate their significance. Many paintings of the Orchid Pavilion Gathering distinguish the famous calligrapher Wang Xizhi from the rest of the participants by placing him in a pavilion.³⁹ In *Elegant Gathering in the Apricot Garden*, Yang Rong (the host of the meeting) and Yang Shiqi, two of the powerful Three Yangs (*sanyang* 三楊), are placed close to the center of the composition.⁴⁰ Accompanied by another gentleman named Wang Zhi 王直, this group is surrounded by the largest number of attendants and by objects symbolizing their wealth and refined tastes. In the larger painting of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll, Yuan Mei is shown in a pavilion, a more elevated position than the women in the garden; Dai Lanying and her son

³⁹ Examples include an ink rubbing made from the composition by the Northern Song painter Li Gonglin. This work is the collection of the Asia Society. Another instance, a handscroll by the Ming painter Qian Gu 錢穀 (1508–ca. 1578), is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

⁴⁰ The Three Yangs are Yang Shiqi, Yang Rong, and Yang Pu 楊溥 (1372–1446). The Xuande Emperor (r. 1425–35) passed away at the age of thirty-seven, and then the Zhengtong Emperor (r. 1435–49 and 1457–64) ascended the throne as a nine-year boy. Empress Dowager Zhang, the mother of the Xuande emperor, thus entrusted the Three Yangs to be the counselors of the young emperor. The three stabilized the transition between the two emperors and made the early years of the Zhengtong reign a peaceful and prosperous period. Wu Sung-feng 吳誦芬, “Xie Huan xingyuan yaji tu yanjiu 謝環杏園雅集圖研究” (master's thesis, Taipei National University of the Arts 國立台北藝術大學, 2002), 34. Yang Rong indicated the name of the participants shown in Xie Huan's composition in a postface. For a translation, see Maxwell K. Hearn, “An Early Ming Example of Multiples,” 222.

are present, but Dai's stance by the side of the seated Yuan conveys her duty to attend to the master. In addition to the framing elements of architecture and attendants, two trees to the left of the pavilion provide Yuan Mei with an overhead canopy. Such special treatment conveys the hierarchy of the painting's figures without the viewer requiring knowledge of the relationship between the man and the women.

The thirteen female disciples in this painting engage in many of the literati amusements found in the classic elegant-gathering pictures and portraits of male scholars.⁴¹ Xi Peilan plays the *qin*, a common pastime of male literati.⁴² "Western Garden Record" mentions the placement of a *qin* and antique vessels on a large stone table; pictures of this event often feature this instrument.⁴³ In *Wang Menglou Playing Qin* 王夢樓撫琴圖 (fig. 3.7), the instrument is among the included objects that indicate the cultivation of Yuan Mei's friend, Wang Wenzhi (art name: Menglou 夢樓).⁴⁴ In *Thirteen Female Disciples*, the vignette of Xi Peilan playing *qin* while Xu Yuxin sits nearby and listens recalls the term *zhiyin* 知音, literally "understanding [one's] musical tune," which was often used to refer to one's closest friend. The term comes from the story of Boya 伯牙 and Zhong Ziqi 鐘子期: Boya, an excellent *qin* player, broke his instrument

⁴¹ The Four Arts (*siyi* 四藝) of scholars include playing the zither (*qin*), writing calligraphy, painting, and playing the strategy game, *weiqi*. The four pastimes or related objects frequently appear in pictures of elegant gatherings and portraits of male scholars. The term *siyi* can be found in a writing by the late Ming scholar Li Yu 李漁 (1610–80) on the skills cultivated gentlemen should teach their women. Li Yu, "Xiji disi 習技第四," in *Xianqing ouji* 閒情偶寄, *juan* 3 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1985), 135. Lothar Ledderose calls these "the four liberal arts of the literatus." Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1979), 29.

⁴² For Confucian scholars, music is not only a component of rituals but also a means of governance, self-cultivation, and expression of hearts and minds. Many literati, including Confucius (551–479 BCE) and his students, were noted to be *qin* players. Through the music created by plucking the strings of this instrument, Confucius understood the identity and virtue of the Sage King Wen (r. 1099–50 BCE) of the Zhou dynasty. Joseph S. C. Lam, "The Presence and Absence of Female Musicians and Music in China," in *Women and Confucian cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan*, ed. Dorothy Ko, JaHyun Kim Haboush, and Joan R. Piggott (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2003), 101–2.

⁴³ Mi Fu, "Xiyuan yajitu ji," 154.

⁴⁴ This portrait is in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing. For reproductions, see Yang Xin 楊新, *Ming Qing xiaoxianghua* 明清肖像畫 (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2008), 168–69.

and vowed never to play again after Zhong Ziqi, his *zhiyin*, passed away.⁴⁵ Playing *qin* to amuse oneself or like-minded others is an activity often shown in paintings of elegant gatherings. In *Composing Poetry on a Spring Outing*, a gentleman walks toward a bridge with a servant carrying a wrapped *qin*, possibly for him to play for his friends. In *Elegant Gathering in the Harmony Garden*, a composition showing Yuan Mei in the company of his contemporary male intellectuals, Yuan appears with the instrument.⁴⁶

In *Thirteen Female Disciples*, Wang Shen is about to inscribe a banana leaf, suggesting her ability in calligraphy, another art highly esteemed by Chinese scholars.⁴⁷ This image recalls that of the Northern Song calligrapher Mi Fu inscribing another natural object, a rock; this vignette was typically featured in paintings of the Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden. Wang Shen's episode can be traced more specifically to an anecdote concerning Huaisu 懷素 (725–85), a famous Tang-dynasty calligrapher who excelled in wild-cursive script.⁴⁸ Huaisu was poor and unable to afford paper on which to practice calligraphy; thus, he planted ten thousand banana trees around his residence so that he could use the leaves in the place of paper. The Qianlong emperor 乾隆 (r. 1736–96), a Manchu who often fashioned himself as a Chinese

⁴⁵ The story can be found in Lü Buwei 呂不韋, *Lüshi chunqiu xin jiaoshi shang* 呂氏春秋新校釋上, ed. Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), 744–45. One early appearance of the term *zhiyin* is in a writing by Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226). Cao Pi, “Yu Wu Zhi shu 與吳質書,” in *Wenxuan* 文選, ed. Xiao Tong 蕭統 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 1897.

⁴⁶ Liang Guozhi's 梁國治 identifies the human figures in *Elegant Gathering in the Harmony Garden* in his “Suiyuan yajitu ji 隨園雅集圖記,” in *Suiyuan yajitu tiyong yijuan*, 52.

⁴⁷ Writing calligraphy was part of the education of Chinese literati, one of the Six Arts (*liuyi* 六藝) elevated by ancient Confucian scholars, and one of the Three Perfections (*sanjue* 三絕) admired by cultivated Chinese. The Six Arts are ritual, music, archery, charioteering, writing, and calculating. According to Lothar Ledderose, after the Han dynasty, the concept of the Six Arts fell into oblivion, yet calligraphy survived and continued to be an important art form of the educated elite. Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition*, 28–9. The Three Perfections are poetry, calligraphy, and painting. Michael Sullivan, *The Three Perfections: Chinese Painting, Poetry, and Calligraphy* (New York: George Braziller, 1999), 11.

⁴⁸ Lu Yu 陸羽, “Seng Huaisu zhuan 僧懷素傳,” in *Qinding Quan tangwen* 欽定全唐文, ed. Dong Gao 董誥 (Tainan: Jingwei shuju, 1965), 5590.

scholar, also adopted this iconography. In *Prince Hongli Practicing Calligraphy on a Banana Leaf* (fig. 3.8), the future emperor is about to write on the leaf placed in front of him.⁴⁹ The Ming officials Tu Yong and Wu Kuan are both shown writing in *Gathering for Birthday Celebration in the Bamboo Garden*, the former in the process of inscribing a bamboo stem and the latter writing on a handscroll. Thus, the depiction of Wang Shen casts her as a follower of famous calligraphers and documents her devotion to the art of calligraphy.

Liao Yunjin, in the *Thirteen Female Disciples*, is the woman shown painting, a pastime elevated by Chinese scholars to become one of the Three Perfections (*sanjue* 三絕).⁵⁰ She paints a cut branch of flowering plum, which reflects the fact that most female painters from the families of scholars worked in the bird-and-flower genre.⁵¹ Her pursuit of this activity also recalls the image of Li Gonglin painting in the *Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden*.⁵² In other elegant-gathering pictures, this literati amusement is often shown through scenes of men appreciating paintings or is simply indicated by the presence of scrolls. For example, Lü Ji and Lü Wenying are portrayed viewing a hanging scroll in *Gathering for Birthday Celebration in the Bamboo Garden*. A set of four Ming scrolls of *Eighteen Scholars* (fig. 3.9) in the National Palace Museum in Taipei depicts the Four Arts (*siyi* 四藝) of Chinese scholars, and the art of painting is shown by the image of a few gentlemen gazing at a landscape painting.⁵³

⁴⁹ This portrait is in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing. For a reproduction, see plate 187 in Evelyn S. Rawski and Jessica Rawson, *China: the Three Emperors, 1662–1795* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005).

⁵⁰ Michael Sullivan, *The Three Perfections*, 11.

⁵¹ Ellen Johnston Laing, “Women Painters in Traditional China,” in *Flowering in the Shadows: Women in the History of Chinese and Japanese Painting*, ed. Marsha Weidner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1990), 92. Weidner, Marsha. *Views from Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists, 1300–1912*. Indianapolis, IN: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1988. Liao Yunjin was known for her capabilities in painting various genres, including bird-and-flower, landscape, and ink orchid. Jiang Baoling 蔣寶齡, “Zhiyun nüshi 織雲女史,” in *Molin jinhua* 墨林今話 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1992), 156–57.

⁵² Mi Fu, “Xiyuan yajitu ji,” 154.

⁵³ This set of four hanging scrolls depicts eighteen scholars, divided into four groups and engaged in the following activities, one depicted per scroll: waiting for a servant to unwrap a zither (*qin*), playing the game *weiqi*, writing, and

Alone and away from the activities of the other students, Bao Zhihui lowers a fishing pole into the stream, a favored pose of Chinese scholars. Chinese literati, who long romanticized fishermen as recluses or carefree wanderers of waterways, in contrast to men who toiled in the dusty urban world, were often portrayed in the guise of fishermen.⁵⁴ Qing-period examples include *Portrait of Gao Shiqi with Female Servant* (fig. 3.10), in which the famous painter and calligrapher Gao Shiqi 高士奇 (1644–1703) sits on a boat and holds a fishing pole over his head.⁵⁵ In *Playing Flute on A Boat Near the Yuebo Pavilion* 月波吹笛圖 (fig. 3.11), the scholar Zhu Kuntian 朱昆田 (1652–99) plays the instrument, with his fishing pole fastened to the side of his boat.⁵⁶ In *Elegant Gathering in the Harmony Garden*, the scholar and poet Jiang Shiquan 蔣士銓 (1725–84) appears in the pose of a fisherman. The vignette of Bao Zhihui fishing suggests her longing for a free lifestyle and her knowledge of the pose as a culturally significant symbol.

The unusual depiction of many women and one man in *Thirteen Female Disciples* distinguishes it as a feminine variation on the traditionally male paintings of elegant gatherings. Typically, women in paintings of men's elegant gatherings are female entertainers or attendants, as seen in pictures of *Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden*.⁵⁷ In contrast, in the *Thirteen Female Disciples*, most of the women are self-contained individuals pursuing their own interests or are audiences for other women. Even though Yuan Mei is present, the physical distance and

viewing a hanging scroll held by a boy. For reproductions, see Guoli gugong bowuyuan, *Wenren yashi: Mingren shiba xueshitu* 文人雅事: 明人十八學士圖 (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 2012), 13, 19, 15, and 31.

⁵⁴ John Hay, “‘Along the River during Winter’s First Snow’: A Tenth-Century Handscroll and Early Chinese Narrative,” *Burlington Magazine* 114, no. 830 (May 1972): 297–98.

⁵⁵ This painting is in the collection of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. For a reproduction, see William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts and Ho Wai-kam, *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting*, 350.

⁵⁶ This handscroll is in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing. For reproductions, see Yang Xin, *Ming Qing xiaoxianghua* 明清肖像畫, 122–23.

⁵⁷ The text attributed to Mi Fu identifies the women as female attendants of the host, Wang Shen. Mi Fu, “Xiyuan yajitu ji,” 154.

the architectural barrier between him and his students discourage a visual reading of the women as entertainers or attendants. As for the one woman in the pavilion, Yuan Mei's first colophon indicates she is a relative, not a servant.

What also marks this scroll as a feminine variant of male elegant-gathering pictures is evidence of inspirations from ideal-beauty paintings. A few poses of the women suggest that the painters of the scroll took inspiration from pictures of idealized beautiful women, even though the female students were known for scholarly accomplishment rather than physical appearance. Yuan Mei's student Jin Yi, for instance, holds up a round fan. A poem attributed to Lady Ban, a neglected imperial consort of the emperor Cheng (r. 32–37 BCE) of the Western Han dynasty (202 BCE–8 CE), offers one early association of woman and this kind of fan. Interpreting this poem, Wilt Idema and Beata Grant liken the deserted woman to the round fan used to bring coolness: the fan is put away once the summer heat dies down, just as the consort is left behind once the emperor's love fades.⁵⁸ This image is captured by the Ming painter Tang Yin 唐寅 (1470–1523) in *Lady Ban's Round Fan* (fig. 3.12), which shows the consort standing alone by a few palm trees and flowering hollyhocks in a garden.⁵⁹ The round fan became a popular accessory of Chinese women, who used it to hide their faces, drive away heat, and capture butterflies. Catching butterflies (*pudie* 撲蝶) by hitting them with a fan was a popular feminine activity.⁶⁰ As recorded in “Register of Beauties” (*Meiren pu* 美人譜), the round fan can enhance

⁵⁸ Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 78.

⁵⁹ This painting is in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. For reproductions, see Liu Fang-ju 劉芳如 and Chang Hua-chih 張華芝, *Qunfangpu: nüxing de xingxiang yu caiyi* 群芳譜: 女性的形象與才藝 (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 2003), 64–5.

⁶⁰ According to the Qing source *Records of the Beauty of the Suzhou Seasons* (*Wujun suihua jili* 吳郡歲華紀麗), at the Birthday of Flowers (*huazhao* 花朝) in the second month of the lunar calendar, young women from the inner chamber would have Gatherings of Hitting Butterflies (*pudiehui* 撲蝶會). Yuan Jinglan 袁景瀾, “Baihua shengri 百花生日,” in *Wujun suihua jili* 吳郡歲華紀麗, *juan* 2 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1998), 65. Both Chinese writers and painters portrayed this activity in their works. Chapter 27 of *Dream of the Red Chamber* records Xue

the attractiveness of beautiful women, and hitting butterflies with fans is one suitable activity of these women.⁶¹

Another student depicted in *Thirteen Female Disciples*, Wang Zuanzu 汪纘祖, holds up a flower. Although portraits also depict male scholars holding flowers, the frequent appearance of the pose in portraits of women and pictures of idealized beauties encourages its feminine interpretation. One early example is *Court Ladies Wearing Flowered Headdresses* (fig. 3.13), attributed to the Tang painter Zhou Fang 周昉 (active ca. 780–ca.810).⁶² The flower-holding pose not only invites the viewer to compare the beauty of the depicted woman with that of the flower in her hand but also recalls the pervasive Chinese cultural equation of women with flowers. Many women are named after flowers; for example, those whose given names contain *lan* 蘭, the Chinese character for the orchid, include Yuan Mei's female disciples Luo Qilan, Chen Shulan 陳淑蘭, Dai Lanying, and Xi Peilan.⁶³ Sun Yunhe and Xu Yuxin both had this character in their art names.⁶⁴ Chinese literati often compare the beauty of women to that of

Baochai 薛寶釵, one of the heroines, hitting a jade-colored butterfly with a fan. Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹, *Hongloumeng* 紅樓夢 (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 2003), 285. In the Ming painting, *Spring Dawn in the Han Palace* 漢宮春曉, by Qiu Ying 仇英 in the National Palace Museum in Taipei, one lady at the end of the composition performs this pose. For reproductions, see Liu Fang-ju and Chang Hua-chih, *Qunfangpu*, 50–1.

⁶¹ Xu Zhen 徐震, “Meirenpu 美人譜,” reprinted in *Xiangyan congshu* 香豔叢書, vol. 1, ed. Chongtianzi 蟲天子 (Taipei: Guting shuwu, 1969), 16–7.

⁶² This work is in the collection of Liaoning Provincial Museum. For reproductions, see Yang Xin, et al., *Zhongguo huihua sanqiannian* 中國繪畫三千年 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1999), 80–1.

⁶³ Literally, Qilan means “marvelous orchid”; Shulan, “pure orchid”; Lanying, “orchid flower”; Peilan, “wearing an orchid.”

⁶⁴ Sun Yunhe's art name is Lanyou 蘭友, literally “orchid's friend.” Li Junzhi 李濬之, *Qinghuajia shishi* 清畫家詩史, *guishang* 癸上, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong Qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian* 三十三種清代人物傳記資料彙編, vol. 40 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 496. Xu Yuxin's art name is Lanyun 蘭蘊, literally “gathered orchid.” Li Junzhi, *Qinghuajia shishi*, *guishang* 癸上, 493.

flowers.⁶⁵ These men ranked courtesans in the “Record of Flowers” (*hua’an* 花案), in which they sometimes assigned different flowers to individual female entertainers.⁶⁶

In a recent study, Liang Fei-Yi 梁妃儀 offers another interpretation of the pose; after the Song dynasty (960–1279), she notes, writers used the term *nianhua* (拈花, “holding up a flower”) to describe poetic enlightenment because they believed in the similarities between Chan Buddhism and poetry, such as intuitive comprehension.⁶⁷ As originally told in a Chan Buddhist story, this gesture was performed by the Buddha on Vulture Peak, and the phrase *nianhua weixiao* (拈花微笑, “holding up a flower and smile”) was then used to describe one’s religious enlightenment and wordless transmission of Buddhist teaching.⁶⁸ Liang recalls a poetic exchange between Sun Yunfeng and Xi Peilan, two female disciples of Yuan Mei. In a set of two seven-character quatrains composed for a portrait of Xi Peilan holding up a flower, Sun Yunfeng writes:

[She] desires to inherit the Buddhist mantle and alms	想承衣鉢侍蓮臺，
bowl and serve before the lotus seat	
To witness heavenly flowers falling and opening.	親見天花落又開。
[Her] sudden enlightenment in the realm of poetry	詩境忽從禪境悟，
comes from the realm of Chan.	

⁶⁵ In Chapter 28 of the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the author describes one of the heroines, Lin Daiyu 林黛玉, as having the appearance of a flower and the countenance of the moon (*huarong yuema* 花容月貌). Cao Xueqin, *Hongloumeng*, 295.

⁶⁶ For more on the “Record of Flowers,” see Gōyama Kiwamu 合山究, *Min Shin jidai no josei to bungaku* 明清時代の女性と文学 (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 2006), 68–109.

⁶⁷ Liang Fei-Yi, “Cong nüxing zhuyi de guandian kan Qingdai shinühua 從女性主義的觀點看清代仕女畫” (master’s thesis, Taipei National University of the Arts, 2000), 55.

⁶⁸ Albert Welter translates the story in “Mahakasyapa’s Smile: Silent Transmission and the Kung-an (Kōan) Tradition,” in *Koan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University, 2000), 75.

[She was] instructed to not have it scattered away but
have it held up. 不教散去卻拈來。⁶⁹

Adopting this perspective, the “heavenly flower” in the hand of Xi Peilan symbolizes poetic enlightenment, an interpretation corresponding to her public identity as a poet.

The second of Sun Yunfeng’s quatrains supports the more traditionally feminine interpretation of Xi Peilan holding a flower, as it compares Xi to a peony:

The naturalistic small portrait sketches appearance and disposition.	天然小像寫丰神,
The national beauty is unparalleled and [brings] spring to those around [her].	國色無雙四座春。
[I should] tease the various West Lake students;	應笑西湖諸弟子,
Though studying with [the same teacher, they are] no match with the person in the picture. ⁷⁰	從游不及畫中人。 ⁷¹

The phrase “national beauty” (*guose* 國色) refers to both the appearance of Xi Peilan and the flower in her hand. Since the whereabouts of the portrait is unknown, the kind of flower actually

⁶⁹ Sun Yunfeng, “Ti Xi Peilan nüshi nianhua xiaozhao 題席佩蘭女史拈花小照,” in *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan*, *juan 1*, 26.

⁷⁰ The word *congyou* 從游 can mean roaming with, socializing with, and studying with. *Hanyu dacidian* 漢語大詞典, vol. 3 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1983), 1013.

⁷¹ Sun Yunfeng, “Ti Xi Peilan nüshi nianhua xiaozhao,” in *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan*, *juan 1*, 26.

depicted in this picture is uncertain. However, those familiar with Chinese literature would name the peony since many poets use the phrase “national beauty” to refer to this flower.⁷²

Standing by a bamboo grove, in *Thirteen Female Disciples*, Jiang Xinbao 蔣心寶 holds a bamboo stem with her left hand and tilts her head as if in deep thought. In many paintings of women or idealized beauties, the subjects are often depicted as if they are too fragile to support themselves without holding, sitting on, or leaning against garden elements. Such poses can be interpreted to mean the women are longing or waiting for men. For example, *A Fairy Beauty at Quiet Rest* (fig. 3.14), a hanging scroll dated to 1640, shows a woman sitting on and leaning against a porous rock. She is shown directly gazing at and presenting her body to the viewer while touching her lip with her pinky; James Cahill sees this as a provocative pose.⁷³ If Jiang Xinbao were not surrounded by the other women engaging in scholarly activities, her pose would possibly be interpreted as a beauty waiting for her absent lover.

Conclusion

Despite the large number of elegant-gathering pictures that survive, elegant gatherings of women were rare subjects in the history of Chinese painting. To represent the poetry gathering of Yuan Mei and his female students, the painters of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll looked to the compositional and iconographical features common to paintings of this traditionally male theme and portraits of literati. These artistic choices not only corresponded to but also promoted, through the circulation of the painting, the public identities of the depicted women as writers and

⁷² One example is in a poem by the Tang poet Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842). Liu Yuxi, “Shang mudan 賞牡丹,” reprinted in *Quan tangshi* 全唐詩, ed. Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 912.

⁷³ James Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure: Vernacular Painting in High Qing China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2010), 176.

artists. Though a few of their postures remind a viewer of pictures of idealized beauties, the painting's visual context encourages alternative interpretations and prevents the construing of the female students' depictions as images created primarily for male pleasure.

Chapter Four: Concepts of Feminine Beauty in the Late Imperial Period and Textual and Visual Representations of the Women in *Thirteen Female Disciples*

Yuan Mei's female students were known for their artistic and literary abilities, and they appear as individuals in the main painting of the handscroll. However, the Qing-period writers, including the authors of the scroll's colophons, imagined that they were idealized beauties. This chapter addresses the discrepancy between such texts and the scroll's images. I begin with an analysis of concepts of feminine beauty prevalent in the late imperial period, using selected Qing-period texts that convey the perspectives of male scholars on characteristics of beautiful women. After a brief consideration of how such ideas are embodied in pictures of idealized beauties, I turn to the portrayal of Yuan Mei's students in the colophons of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll and writings by their contemporaries. The chapter concludes with an examination of the scroll painters' rejections of common visual conventions in pictures of beauties, taking into consideration the main painting's function and the students' identities as affecting these artistic choices.

4.1 The Concept of Feminine Beauty in the Late Imperial Period and Its Embodiment in Pictures of Idealized Women

Male scholars wrote of their ideals of feminine beauty, which they pursued when selecting concubines and courting female entertainers. Of concern was not only a woman's physical appearance but also her cultivation in various arts, so that the men could enjoy interests with and be inspired by their companions. The playwright Li Yu 李漁 (1610–80), Yuan Mei's precedent in advocating the match of “talent and beauty” (*caizi jiaren*), wrote “On Voices and

Countenances” (*Shengrong bu* 聲容部) to advise men on how to select and cultivate women.¹

The early Qing scholar Zhang Chao 張潮 (born 1650) compiled *Shadows of Secluded Dreams*

(*Youmeng ying* 幽夢影) that records literati comments on women.² Two lesser known writers,

Wei Yong 衛泳 and Xu Zhen 徐震, wrote “Chapter on Beautify to Delight” (*Yuerong pian* 悅容

篇) and “Register of Beauties” (*Meiren pu* 美人譜); the former provides suggestions on the

appropriate residence, furniture, education, accessories, and costumes for beautiful women as

well as the author’s appreciation for them.³ The latter touches on the beauties’ physical features,

appropriate skills and activities, and suitable residences, costumes, and accessories for them.⁴

Physical attractiveness certainly affected scholars’ choices of women. To justify his indulgence in feminine beauty, Li Yu began his “On Voices and Countenances” by citing the words of ancient sages:

“The appetites for food and sex are human nature.”⁵ “One who failed to recognize the beauty of Zidu would have to be without eyes.”⁶ Great sages in the past chose words to speak. They did not go against human feelings and made these statements several times, as they took [the desires for sex and physical beauty] as

¹ Li Yu 李漁, “Shengrong bu 聲容部,” in *Xianqing ouji* 閒情偶寄 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1985), 100–42.

² Zhang Chao 張潮, *Youmeng ying* 幽夢影 (Taipei: Wulin chubanshe, 1983).

³ Wei Yong 衛泳, “Yuerong pian 悅容篇,” reprinted in *Xiangyan congshu* 香豔叢書, vol.1, ed. Chongtianzi 蟲天子 (Taipei: Guting shuwu, 1969), 71–81. As indicated by the author, the title, “Chapter on Beautify to Delight,” comes from *Strategies of the Warring States* (*Zhanguo ce* 戰國策): “...the true warrior requites the lord who knew his worth by dying for him, just as a woman makes herself beautiful for the man who delights in her...” 士為知己者死, 女為悅己者容. J. I. Crump, trans., *Chan-kuo ts’u* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1996), 279.

⁴ Xu Zhen 徐震, “Meiren pu 美人譜,” reprinted in *Xiangyan congshu* 香豔叢書, vol.1, ed. Chongtianzi 蟲天子 (Taipei: Guting shuwu, 1969), 13–7.

⁵ Translated by Irene Bloom in *Mencius* (New York: Columbia University, 2009), 122.

⁶ Translated by Irene Bloom in *Mencius*, 126.

if originally possessed [by humans], and it was impossible to forcefully make them vanish.

食色性也，不知子都之姣者，無目者也。古之大賢擇言而發，其所以不拂人情，而數為是論者，以惟所原有，不能強之使無耳。⁷

Male scholars often defined feminine beauty by matching pleasant features of the world to aspects of women, and many of their comparisons have historical or literary references. As Zhang Chao wrote:

When we refer to beautiful women—[we] use flowers for their countenances, the bird for voices, the moon for manners, the willow for their attitudes, the jade for bones, ice and snow for skin, autumn stream for demeanor, and poetic words for their hearts.

所謂美人者，以花為貌，以鳥為聲，以月為神，以柳為態，以玉為骨，以冰雪為膚，以秋水為姿，以詩詞為心。⁸

According to Xu Zhen, physical features of beauties include the “cicada forehead” 螭首, “*hu* melon seeds teeth” 犀齒, and “tender-grass fingers” 蕙指—the features of Lady Zhuangjiang 莊姜 as recorded in the *Book of Poetry*.⁹ Beauties should also have the “willow waist” 楊柳腰 of

⁷ Li Yu, “Shengrong bu,” 100.

⁸ Zhang Chao, *Youmeng ying*, 49–50.

⁹ For an English version of this text, see James Legge, “Shih Jên 碩人,” in *The Book of Poetry: Chinese Text with English Translation* (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1967), 63.

Xiaoman 小蠻, a private musician of the Tang poet Bai Juyi 白居易, and the “lotus face” 芙蓉臉 and “faraway-mountain eyebrows” 遠山眉 of the Han female talent Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君.¹⁰

Some attractive bodily characteristics, such as “milk[-like] breasts” 酥乳, inspired poetic thought and were subjects of erotic compositions by the Tang courtesan Zhao Luanluan 趙鸞鸞.¹¹

Moreover, the phrase “every step a lotus” (*bubulian* 步步蓮) indicates a beauty walking elegantly with bound feet; it refers to Lady Pan of the Southern Qi dynasty (479–502), whose graceful walk on a floor inlaid with gold lotus petals fascinated the emperor, Qi Feidi 齊廢帝.¹²

In the eyes of men, beautiful women and flowers share characteristics, and they are often paired together in literature. As Zhang Chao wrote: “Because of the flower, [one] recalls beautiful women” 因花想美人.¹³ He also stated: “The butterfly is the talented scholar’s incarnation, and the flower is the beauty’s art name” 蝶為才子之化身, 花乃美人之別號.¹⁴ Wei Yong compared the appropriate residence for beauties to a balustrade and vase by and in which flowers are grown and displayed, for he argues that “the beauty is the flower’s true body, and the flower is the beauty’s small portrait” 美人是花真身, 花是美人小影.¹⁵ Li Yu shared a similar perspective: “Famous flowers and beautiful women have the same scent; wherever there are national beauties, there surely are heavenly fragrances” 名花美女氣味相同, 有國色必有天香.¹⁶

¹⁰ For Xiaoman, see Li Fang 李昉, *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, *juan* 198 (Taipei: Xinxing shuju, 1962), 684. For Zhuo Wenjun, see Ge Hong 葛洪, *Xijing zaji* 西京雜記 (Shanghai: Hanfenlou, 1922), 3.2b.

¹¹ Zhao Luanluan, “Suru 酥乳,” in *Quan tangshi* 全唐詩, *juan* 802 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 1968.

¹² From an anecdote in *Nanshi* 南史: When Consort Pan walked on this floor, the emperor commented on her grace, saying “with every step there grows a lotus!” Keith McMahan translated this anecdote in “Favorite Consort Pan and the Origin of the Golden Lotus,” in *Women Shall Not Rule: Imperial Wives and Concubines in China from Han to Liao* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 159.

¹³ Zhang Chao, *Youmeng ying*, 17.

¹⁴ Zhang Chao, *Youmeng ying*, 17.

¹⁵ Wei Yong, “Yuerong pian,” 73.

¹⁶ Li Yu, “Shengrong bu,” 114.

As expressed by the literati, the ideal female companion should possess not only an attractive appearance but also artistic and literary skills so that she could inspire a scholar or enjoy his interests. The activities deemed appropriate for beauties include both traditionally male and female pursuits and enjoyments. In Li Yu's guidelines, "literary art" 文藝 is the first, followed by "string and pipe instruments" 絲竹 and "singing and dancing" 歌舞.¹⁷ Wei Yong also advocated for women's literary and artistic education: "Women who become literate will have a scholarly air; therefore, reading books and painting are the learning in the inner chamber" 女人識字, 便有一種儒風, 故閱書畫, 是閨中學識.¹⁸ Xu Zhen suggested a variety of activities, including the female work of "embroidering" 刺繡 and "brocading" 織錦 and the scholarly and artistic pastimes of chanting poems, playing the *weiqi* game, writing calligraphy, painting, and playing the *qin* zither or the *xiao* flute.

Other skills and activities associated with beautiful women, as indicated by Xu Zhen, include the table games "Chinese dominos" 抹牌 and *shanglu* 雙陸 and outdoor activities like "catching butterflies" 撲蝶, "swinging" 鞦韆, and playing *doucao* 鬥草 and *cuju* 蹴鞠 games.¹⁹ The beauties might also be "caring for orchids" 護蘭, "preparing tea" 煎茶, "burning incense" 焚香, improvising poetry about snow (literally "incanting on willow catkins" 咏絮),²⁰ "teaching

¹⁷ Li Yu, "Shengrong bu," 131.

¹⁸ Wei Yong, "Yuerong pian," 75.

¹⁹ For the game *doucao* 鬥草, the participants compete for the amount and quality of the flowers and grasses they gather. *Hanyu dacidian* 漢語大詞典, vol. 12 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1983), 712. *Cuju* 蹴鞠 is a ball game played by kicking a ball. *Chongbian guoyu cidian* 重編國語辭典 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1981), 4630.

²⁰ Stands for talented women; it refers to the female poet Xie Daoyun 謝道韞 from the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420) who improvised a poetic line on snow. See Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 137.

parrots to chant poems” 教鸚鵡念詩, “viewing flowers at spring dawn” 春曉看花, and “appreciating the moon’s reflection in a gold basin” 金盆弄月.²¹

The proper care of beauties should include appointing nicely decorated residences for them and having them wear exquisite costumes and accessories, as their attractiveness could be enhanced by their surroundings. According to Xu Zhen, these women should reside and banquet in magnificent places, such as the palatial “gold house” 金屋 and “jade tower” 玉樓 for the Tang beauty, Precious Consort Yang 楊貴妃.²² Their living quarters should be furnished with fine furniture, tasteful objects, and books; these include “beaded blinds” 珠簾, “ivory beds” 象牙床, “jade mirror stands” 玉鏡台, “gold censers” 金爐, “ancient vases” 古瓶, “famous flowers” 名花, and various poetry-related books, including “dictionaries of rhythms” 韻書, the *Book of Poetry*, and “collected poems in the *yutai* and *xianglian* styles” 玉台香奩諸集. Costumes and accessories suitable for them are “beaded robes” 珠衫, “silk shawls” 綃帔, “embroidered skirts” 繡裙, “shoes decorated with phoenixes” 鳳頭鞋, “rhinoceros-horn hair pins” 犀簪, “jade pendants” 玉珮, and “silk round fans” 紈扇. Providing them with writing utensils and musical instruments—including “brushes made of rabbit fur” 兔穎, “colorful paper” 錦箋, “ink stones made in Duanxi” 端硯, *qin* zithers, and *xiao* flutes—enables them to polish their literary and artistic skills. They should be accompanied by “handsome maids” 俊婢 to while away loneliness when their loved ones are absent.

²¹ Xu Zhen’s suggestions in this paragraph are from “Meiren pu,” 15–6.

²² The information in this paragraph is drawn from Xu Zhen, “Meiren pu,” 16–7. For the “gold house” and “jade tower,” see Bai Juyi 白居易, “Changhen ge 長恨歌,” in *Quan tangshi*, *juan* 435, 1075.

Talented and beautiful women have long captured the attention of Chinese painters and frequently appear in the genres known as “gentlewoman painting” (*shinü hua* 仕女畫) or “beautiful-woman painting” (*meiren hua* 美人畫). In addition, they are included in portraits of male scholars, didactic works showing womanly virtues, and pictures illustrating the ideal “talent and beauty” union, all of which portrayed their subjects in accordance with male scholars’ ideas of feminine beauty.

In later beautiful-woman paintings, the physical features of the women correspond to the standards of beauty of late-imperial China. For example, all of the women in the Qing handscroll, *Female Pursuits of the Four Seasons* (fig. 4.1), have smooth, egg-shape faces with small, delicate features.²³ Their bodies are fully covered, but exposed below are their “golden lotuses” 金蓮, or bound feet, one popular measure of a woman’s beauty. The Ming painting, *Unsurpassed Beauties Throughout Generations* 千秋絕艷圖 (fig. 4.2), reflects the late-imperial fascination for a more willowy body type: the plump Tang-dynasty beauty, Precious Consort Yang, is shown with a slender figure and sloping shoulders.²⁴

Not only the women’s costumes and accessories but also the objects of their surroundings were used to enhance their attractiveness, indicate their cultivation, and hint at their identities. The beauty in the Qing painting, *Lady Embroidering* (fig. 4.3), is shown wearing a long white skirt, a red garment buttoned at the neck, and a blue outer robe with embroidered trim and cuffs.²⁵ Her coiled-up hair is decorated with ornaments made of gold, pearls, precious stones, and kingfisher feathers. She is accompanied by a nicely dressed maid and is surrounded by various

²³ This handscroll is in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas.

²⁴ This handscroll is in the collection of the National Museum of China, Beijing. For reproductions, see Guo Xueshi 郭学是 and Zhang Zikang 张子康, *Zhongguo lidai shinühua ji* 中國歷代仕女畫集 (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin meishu chubanshe), plates 72–90.

²⁵ This hanging scroll is in the collection of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

objects, including an embroidery stand on which she rests her elbows, a book placed on a corner of the stand, a blue-and-white porcelain tea bowl presented by the maid, and a potted, blossoming orchid in front of her. Further into the room is a raised sitting area decorated with a small table, a *ruyi* scepter, a bowl of Buddha's Hand fruits, and a landscape painting hung on the wall. The fingered citron provided both pleasant fragrance and erotic symbol.²⁶ The orchid, a favorite plant of Chinese scholars, was also a frequent painting subject for artistic courtesans.²⁷ Therefore, the woman in this painting may be an entertainer-turned-concubine who possesses not only scholarly cultivation, as suggested by the ink landscape painting, but also female virtue, as indicated by her needlework.

Like fragile flowers that require constant care and protection, the beauties are often shown in a controlled environment, such as the inner chamber of a house or a private garden. *Female Pursuits of the Four Seasons* depicts a group of beauties engaging in various activities throughout a year. Even though most of the figures are depicted outdoors, the architectural features (a pavilion, gated walls, and a raised terrace with a balustrade) and the garden elements (a lotus pond, porous rocks, and arranged trees and flowers) suggest that they are located within a private property with attached gardens.

Pictures of beauties often depict them performing suitable activities, mentioned earlier. The Qing painting, *One Hundred Beauties* 百美图 (fig. 4.4), shows women playing the *qin*, caring for a plant, preparing tea, playing the *xiao*, reading, capturing butterflies, painting, and teaching a parrot.²⁸ The Ming handscroll, *Spring Dawn in the Han Palace* 漢宮春曉 (fig. 4.5)

²⁶ James Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure: Vernacular Painting in High Qing China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2010), 32.

²⁷ Ellen Johnston Laing, "Women Painters in Traditional China," in *Flowering in the Shadows: Women in the History of Chinese and Japanese Paintings*, ed. Marsha Weidner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1990), 91.

²⁸ This handscroll is in the Roy and Marilyn Papp Collection. For a reproduction, see Claudia Brown, *Great Qing: Painting in China, 1644–1911* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2014), 142.

depicts women caring for flowers, playing the *qin*, reading, playing games of *doucao* and *weiqi*, embroidering, and capturing butterflies.²⁹

4.2 Yuan Mei's Female Students as Seen through Qing-period Writings

Various Qing-period texts record their authors' perceptions of Yuan Mei's disciples. These writers often referred to this group of female talents using words or phrases that led the reader to imagine them as idealized beauties. To better understand these words, phrases, and their implications, I examine *Jade Terrace History of Painting* (*yutai huashi* 玉臺畫史) by the female scholar Tang Shuyu 湯漱玉 (active 18th–19th century), the colophons in the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll, and poems about Yuan Mei's female disciples by Chen Wenshu 陳文述 (1771–1843), another scholar who supported talented women. I also include writings by Yuan Mei and his female student Xi Peilan regarding beautiful-woman paintings, to highlight the similarities between the verbal images of the beauties and those of Yuan's students.

In *Jade Terrace History of Painting*, Tang Shuyu placed female painters from ancient times through the Qing dynasty into four categories: “palace ladies” 宮掖, “famous beauties” 名媛, “concubines” 姬侍, and “famous courtesans” 名妓.³⁰ While three categories indicate the social status of a woman, the fourth, “famous beauties,” emphasizes a woman's physical appearance. The wives and daughters of male scholars are included in this category; calling them

²⁹ This handscroll is in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. For reproductions, see Liu Fang-ju 劉芳如 and Chang Hua-chih 張華芝, *Qunfangpu: nüxing de xingxiang yu caiyi* 群芳譜: 女性的形象與才藝 (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 2003), 50–3.

³⁰ For more on Tang Shuyu and her *Jade Terrace History of Painting* in English, see Marsha Weidner, “Women in the History of Chinese Painting,” in *Views from Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists, 1300–1912* (Indianapolis, IN: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1988), 17–21. For resources in Chinese, see Xu Yuhong 徐玉紅, *Yutai huashi yanjiu: guanzhu nühuajia shehui juese yu chuangzuo* 玉台畫史研究: 關注女畫家社會角色與創作 (Hangzhou: Zhongguo meishu xueyuan chubanshe, 2012).

beauties was considered a polite compliment because conventionally women who were known for their looks would be in the third or fourth categories, concubines or famous courtesans. Of Yuan Mei's students, Tang Shuyu only included Wu Qiongxian 吳瓊仙, who was married to the late Qing scholar Xu Dayuan 徐達源, placing her in the category of famous beauties.³¹ Wu does not, however, appear as a figure in either picture in the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll but rather wrote a colophon for it.

Words related to the beautiful appearance and graceful demeanor of women frequently appear in the scroll's colophons, suggesting that the writers perceived the depicted women as beauties. One such word is *mei* 蛾眉, literally "moth eyebrows."³² It appears early in the *Book of Poetry* (*Shijing* 詩經) to describe the eyebrows of Lady Zhuangjiang 莊姜.³³ In the Tang dynasty (618–907), it was already a synonym for a beautiful woman. On the death of Precious Consort Yang, the Tang poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) wrote: "The six armies wouldn't march. No help for it. Complaisant and yielding, moth eyebrows died before their steeds."³⁴ In comparing Yuan Mei to the poet Bai Juyi, the colophon author Zeng Ao 曾燠 (1759–1830) wrote: "Tutor Bai's poems were made known to an old woman, [but I have] not heard that his disciples included 'moth eyebrows'" 白傳詩令老嫗知, 未聞門下有蛾眉.³⁵

³¹ Tang Shuyu, *Yutai huashi*, *juan* 3, reprinted in *Qingren huaxue lunzhu xia* 清人畫學論著下 (Taipei: Shijie shuju gufen youxian gongsi, 2011), 398.

³² *Kangxi zidian* 康熙字典 (Taipei: Jinchuan chubanshe, 1977), 1011.

³³ Legge, "Shih Jên," 63.

³⁴ These poetic lines come from "Lament Everlasting" (*Changhen ge* 長恨歌), translated by Howard S. Levy in volume 1 of *Translations From Po Chü-i's Collected Works* (New York: Paragon, 1971), 138.

³⁵ It was believed that Bai Juyi would read his poems to an old woman and then changed the lines that she could not understand. Tony Barnstone and Chou Ping ed., *The Anchor Book of Chinese Poetry: From Ancient to Contemporary, The Full 3000-Year Tradition* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), 166. This anecdote is recorded in Huihong 惠洪, "Laoyu jieshi 老嫗解詩," in *Lengzhai yehua* 冷齋夜話, *juan* 1, reprinted in *Xijianben songren shihua sizhong* 稀見本宋人詩話四種 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 2002), 18. Xi Peilan adopted this reference in her colophon for the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll. For an English translation and explanation, see Jeffrey

Another word used in the colophons is *chanjuan* 嬋娟; as an adjective, it means beautiful or graceful, and as a noun, means a beautiful woman.³⁶ One early use of *chanjuan* as an adjective is seen in a poem by Bai Juyi: “Beautiful and graceful, her hair on both temples [is like] the autumn cicada’s wings; complaisant and yielding, [the hue of her] two moth [eyebrows] resembles the color of the faraway mountain” 嬋娟兩鬢秋蟬翼, 宛轉雙蛾遠山色.³⁷ Another Tang poet, Quan Deyu 權德輿, used *chanjuan* as a noun: “The beauty, in her sixteenth year, is charming and shy; at dusk, [we] encounter by the southern field” 嬋娟二八正嬌羞, 日暮相逢南陌頭.³⁸ About Yuan Mei’s students, Liu Xi 劉熙 wrote: “[Within Yuan Mei’s] gate and wall, peaches and plums are already planted all over; in one hall, [we] further see coming the *chanjuan*” 門牆桃李栽已遍, 一堂更見來嬋娟. “Peaches and plums” refers to the male students and *chanjuan* to the female ones.³⁹

In addition to nouns, beauty-related adjectives are also common in the colophons; these terms include *hui* (慧, pretty) and *xiuli* (秀麗, lovely). The scholar Li Guang 李光 (1078–1159) incorporated the word *hui* into the phrase “pretty outside and intelligent inside” (*xiuwai huizhong* 秀外慧中): “There is a beauty, under the sky on the other side. Pretty outside and intelligent inside, her body is beautiful and emits fragrance, and her waist is graceful” 有美人兮天一方, 秀外而慧中兮, 體便娟而生香, 腰支婀娜兮.⁴⁰ Used conversely in Cheng Ce’s 成策 colophon,

Riegel, “Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1798) and a Different ‘Elegant Gathering,’” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 32 (December 2010), 107–8.

³⁶ *Kangxi zidian*, 190 and 199.

³⁷ Bai Juyi, “Jingdi yin yinping 井底引銀餅,” in *Quan tangshi*, juan 427, 1049.

³⁸ Quan Deyu 權德輿, “Yutai ti shier shou 玉臺體十二首,” in *Quan tangshi*, juan 328, 810.

³⁹ One early use of the phrase, “peaches and plums,” to refer to students is seen in a poem by the Tang poet Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫. Liu Yuxi, “Xuan shangren yuanji he libu Wang shilang fangbang hou shi yiner jihe 宣上人遠寄和禮部王侍郎放榜後詩因而繼和,” reprinted in *Quan tangshi*, juan 359, 897.

⁴⁰ Li Guang 李光, “Ganchun ci yipian wei ziran shijun zuo 感春辭一篇為自然使君作,” in *Zhuangjian ji* 莊簡集, (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1934), 16.13a.

Yuan Mei's students are "intelligent inside and pretty outside" (*huizhong xiuwai* 慧中秀外). Rendered as *lovely*, the word *xiuli* appears in an anonymous text on the female poet Su Ruolan 蘇若蘭 (active 2nd half of the 4th century) in a Song publication: her "judgment is brilliant and appearance lovely" 識知精明, 儀容秀麗.⁴¹ From the perspective of the colophon author Wu Weiguang 吳蔚光 (1743–1803), the students' "demeanor and appearances are lovely, and their characters are proper and pure" 丰姿秀麗性端純.

Some colophons equate Yuan Mei's disciples with flowers. Liu Xi described the scene of the students receiving lessons at the lake pavilion: "Asking for instruction, people [who] come [are like] myriad flowers that surround [the Master] 問字人來萬花繞." Gui Maoyi 歸懋宜 (ca. 1762–ca. 1832) mentions the activities of the students at the gathering: "[They] write freely on cloud-patterned paper and compete with the flowers' gorgeousness" 雲牋揮灑爭花艷. According to Yu Guojian 俞國鑑, Yuan Mei's acceptance of female students is like the "spring wind" (*chunfeng* 春風) that will bring forth "three thousand peach and plum flowers" (*sanqian taolihua* 三千桃李花). This evokes the phrase "three thousand peach and plum trees" that refers to one's students, traditionally male; due to the conventional equation of women and flowers, adding the flower character *hua* makes the phrase gender specific. The phrase "peach and plum" can also be used for the beautiful appearance of women. As the Tang-dynasty poet Wang Yin 王諱 mentioned: "Can you not see the young girl from the inner chamber in her decent age;

⁴¹ "Sushi zhijin huiwen ji 蘇氏織錦廻文記," in *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華, *juan* 834 (Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1965), 5247. Su Hui 蘇蕙, or Su Ruolan, is famous for her palindrome. For more on Su Ruolan, see Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 127–131.

beautiful peach and plum is [her] immortal-like appearance” 君不見紅閨少女端正時，夭夭桃李仙容姿。⁴²

Other allusions to Yuan Mei’s female disciples include references to makeup, which enhances the attractiveness of women. As early as the Tang dynasty, makeup-related words stood for beauties. The poet Bai Juyi uses the phrase “cosmetic powder and paints” (*fendai* 粉黛) as a metaphor for beauties: due to the gorgeousness of Precious Consort Yang, “the beauties in the imperial harem are without colors” 六宮粉黛無顏色。⁴³ Liu Xi uses the phrase “red cosmetics” (*hongzhuang* 紅妝) in the same way: “[I] only worry that when he [Yuan Mei] is a hundred years old; the “red cosmetics” will truly suppresses three thousand trees” 只恐他年百歲時，紅妝真壓三千樹。The phrase “three thousand trees” is an abbreviation of the “three thousand peach and plum trees” that refers to male pupils. Therefore, one may interpret Liu Xi’s lines as: one day the number or literary achievements of Yuan Mei’s female disciples may suppress that of his male students.

Clothing and accessories also enhance a woman’s appearance, and the words related to them can also stand for beauties. Praising the literary abilities of the disciples, Yu Guojian used the phrase “skirt and hairpin” (*qunji* 裙笄), writing that “before the eyes [of Yuan Mei,] the beauties are fully acquainted with brushes and ink stones” 眼底裙笄諳筆硯。According to Guo Kun 郭壘 (1763–1806), using the phrase “hairpin and bracelet” (*chaichuan* 釵釧): “A group of knowledgeable scholars are all beauties” 一群博士俱釵釧。In another line—“Harmony Garden’s peach and plum are three thousand; *yongxu* and *zanhua*, how can [he] not have them?” 隨園桃李

⁴² Wang Yin 王諱, “Houting yuan 後庭怨,” in *Quan tangshi*, *juan* 145, 336.

⁴³ Bai Juyi, “Changhen ge,” in *Quan tangshi*, *juan* 435, 1075.

三千株, 詠絮簪花何可無—Guo Kun employs several metaphors. The Harmony Garden was Yuan Mei's residence in Nanjing and thus refers to the teacher. "Wearing flowers" (*zanhua* 簪花), an act to beautify oneself, is used in a Tang poem to describe Consort Yu, or Yu the Beauty 虞美人, at her toilette.⁴⁴ Therefore, one can rephrase Guo Kun's lines affirmatively: among Yuan Mei's many students are talented beauties.

In the colophons, words and phrases related to immortals and beings beyond this world describe Yuan Mei's students as beauties and excuse them from the societal norms established by Confucian scholars. These terms include: "spirits of flowers" 花神, "star beauties" 星娥, "moon maidens" 月姐, "jade girls" 玉女, "cloud immortals" 雲仙, and "immortal beauties" 仙娥. The character *xian* (仙, immortals) can refer to one's literary talents; the great Tang poet Li Bai 李白 was called an "exiled immortal" (*zhexian* 謫仙).⁴⁵ In Chinese literature, the popular image of a female immortal or nature spirit was that of a beautiful woman.⁴⁶ According to Liu Xi's note at the end of his colophon, Yuan Mei described his disciples poetically, saying that "star beauties and moon maidens are within [my] gate and wall" 星娥月姐在門牆. Wu Weiguang wrote: "Do not take [the depicted women] for spirits of flowers of twelve months and the intercalary month; [even though when] counting there are exactly thirteen people" 莫認花神

⁴⁴ Feng Daizheng 馮待徵, "Yuji yuan 虞姬怨," in *Quan tangshi*, *juan* 773, 1914.

⁴⁵ The Tang scholar He Zhizhang 賀知章 called Li Bai an exiled immortal. Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, *Xin tangshu* 新唐書 (Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 202.8b.

⁴⁶ Examples include the Female Divinity of Mount Wu 巫山神女, the Nymph of the Luo River 洛神, and "jade girls" 玉女. Song Yu 宋玉, a poet from the Warring States period (ca. 475–221 BCE), wrote about the Female Divinity of Mount Wu in "Rhapsody of Female Divinity" 神女賦. Song Yu, "Shennü fu 神女賦," in *Zengbu liuchen zhu wenxuan* 增補六臣註文選, *juan* 19 (Taipei: Huazheng shuju, 1977), 347–49. The Wei dynasty (220–66) talent Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232) wrote about his encounter with the Nymph of the Luo River in "Rhapsody of Nymph of Luo River" 洛神賦. Cao Zhi, "Luoshen fu 洛神賦," in *Zengbu liuchen zhu wenxuan*, *juan* 19, 350–53. The term jade girl 玉女 refers to the attendant to the Queen Mother of the West 西王母, in Li Fang, *Taiping guangji*, *juan* 3, 294.

連閏月，數來剛好十三人。Guo Kun praised the literary abilities of Yuan Mei's students:

“Before the seat of spring wind are ten thousand poems; a troop of immortal beauties have eight *dou* of talents” 春風座上詩千首，一隊仙娥才八斗。Here, the “spring wind” stands for the teacher, and “eight *dou*” means extraordinary.⁴⁷

In some colophons, although the terms listed above are not used, literary references still describe the women as beings beyond the human realm. According to Hu Sen 胡森:

By the head of the LuoCha River is an old exiled immortal.	羅剎江頭老謫仙，
Spring wind creates the thirteen strings [of the <i>zheng</i>].	春風譜出十三絃。
Piece after piece, the songs from Jade Terrace	一絃一闕瑤臺曲，
Penetrate the West Lake's water, moon, and sky.	響徹西湖水月天。
The rosy evening-cloud garments each reflect the color of the red gauze.	霞裾分映絳紗紅，
The colorfully painted towers enter in the mirror[-like water].	罨畫樓台入鏡中。
The South and North high peaks, at vista points [people see]	南北高峰人望處，

⁴⁷ The phrase “spring wind,” alluding to one's virtue or grace, which can transform others, is from a conversation between Mengjianzi 孟簡子 and Guan Zhong 管仲 recorded in Liu Xiang 劉向, “Gui de 貴德,” in *Shuoyuan* 說苑 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1922), 5.15a. The “eight-*dou* talents” refer to the literary talents of Cao Zhi, the famous poet of the Wei dynasty (220–66), and thus means extraordinary talents. *Shi chang tan* 釋常談, *juan zhi zhong* 卷之中, reprinted in *Baibu congshu jicheng* 百部叢書集成 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1965), 2a.

Brush flowers [skillful writings] fly all over the Purple Orchid Palace.	筆花飛遍紫蘭宮
By the side of the jade-decorated, evening-cloud-colored sedan chair, riding on the wind,	琅霞輦側御風行，
Queen Mother of the West calls to talk about Great Clarity.	阿母相呼語太清。
[Yet,] a troop of colorful clouds is nowhere to be found,	一隊彩雲無處覓，
As [they have already gone to] the foot of Mount Fenghuang to pay respects to the Master. ⁴⁸	鳳皇山下拜先生。

...

Much of the poem describes the poetry gathering at Sun Jiale's property, as they include the nearby sites and views, the West Lake, "twin peaks piercing the clouds" 雙峯插雲, Mount Fenghuang, and the Luocha River, more commonly known as the Qiantang River 錢塘江.⁴⁹ The "spring wind" alludes to Yuan Mei, and the female students in the main painting are referred to as the "thirteen strings [of the *zheng*]" that play songs of the immortals.⁵⁰ The fifth line furthers the image of the students as beings apart from the human world with the metaphor "evening-cloud garments," or the clothing of the immortals.⁵¹ The students inherit Yuan Mei's teaching, as

⁴⁸ The phrase "South and North high peaks" refers to "twin peaks piercing the clouds", one of the ten views of the West Lake. Shen Deqian 沈德潛, *Xihu zhi zuan* 西湖志纂, *juan* 1 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe), 66. Mount Fenghuang is located by the West Lake. Shen Deqian, *Xihu zhi zuan*, *juan* 1, 28.

⁴⁹ Shen Yiji 沈翼機, *Zhejiang tongzhi* 浙江通志, *juan zhi yi* 卷之一 (Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1967), 94.

⁵⁰ According to a fifth-century text, there are twelve jade terraces on the ninth layer of Mount Kunlun 崑崙山, where immortals dwell. Wang Jia 王嘉, *Shiyi ji* 拾遺記, *juan* 10 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 221.

⁵¹ The use of the phrase "evening-cloud garments" to signify the clothing of the immortals is seen in a poem by the Yuan poet Wang Feng 王逢, on the spring feast of the Queen Mother of the West. Wang Feng, "He Zhang Shuaixing tuiguan xiaoyouxian ci ershou 和張率性推官小遊仙詞二首," in *Xuxi ji* 梧溪集, reprinted in *Yuanshixuan* 元詩選, *xia* 下 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1967), 14b.

described by the garments' reflection of "the color of the red gauze."⁵² The phrase "flowers growing from brushes" in the eighth line praises the disciples' literary abilities, and the mention of the Purple Orchid Palace—believed to be the residence of the Queen Mother of the West—again suggests the women are immortals.⁵³ Therefore, one may interpret these eight lines as: the presence of Yuan Mei's female pupils transforms the gathering place into the realm of the immortals. The colophon then confirms that the students were originally immortal attendants of the Queen Mother of the West, prior to their encounter with Yuan Mei.

The woman's proper sphere, the "inner chamber" (*gui* 閨), was another conventional metaphor that appears in the colophons to signify the female disciples or other skilled women. Yu Guojian wrote that "other people compete to know the talents from the inner chamber" 旁人爭識閨房秀, complimenting Yuan Mei's students for their fame beyond their immediate families and social circles. Yu Aotu 于鰲圖 (1750–1811) mourned for the unfortunate women who did not have help from supportive men like Yuan Mei: "[one] should know that elsewhere are [still] many talents from the inner chamber; [if they] do not encounter the Master, who will transmit [their writings]?" 應知此外多閨秀, 不遇先生誰與傳. Zhang Yun'ao shared a similar view: "talented women were originally born from a special atmosphere; often being hidden deep away in the inner chamber is their reputation" 才女原從閨氣生, 往往埋沒深閨名.

The colophon authors describe the women depicted in *Thirteen Female Disciples* as educated beauties who wear elaborate costumes, accessories, and makeup and spend time in the

⁵² The phrase "red gauze" refers to the teacher; one earlier example is in a poem by the Tang poet Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫. Liu Yuxi, "Song Zhao zhongcheng zi sijin wailang zhuang guan can shannan Linghu puye mufu 送趙中丞自司金外郎轉官參山南令狐僕射幕府," reprinted in *Quan tangshi*, *juan* 357, 889.

⁵³ *Extensive Records of the Taiping Era* 太平廣記 records Han Wudi's 漢武帝 encounters with a beautiful "jade girl" from the Purple Orchid Palace of the Queen Mother of the West. Li Fang, *Taiping guangji*, *juan* 3, 294.

inner quarter of a protected space, engaging in various scholarly activities. Their attractive appearances, outstanding literary capabilities, and unconventional interactions with their teacher led the colophon writers to imagine them as immortals who have become mortal. These perceptions of Yuan Mei's disciples are similar to that of other Qing writers, including Chen Wenshu, another open-minded scholar who accepted female students and published their writings in *Poems by Female Disciples of Bicheng Immortal Hall* (*Bicheng xianguan nüdizi shi* 碧城仙館女弟子詩).⁵⁴

Chen Wenshu wrote about Sun Jiale's five daughters, including Yuan Mei's student Sun Yunhe, and portrayed them as beauties with artistic and literary talents. After a brief biography mentioning the Sun sisters' art names and abilities in poetry and painting, Chen Wenshu compared them to the five talented daughters of the Tang scholar Song Tingfen 宋廷芬 (active 8th–9th century).⁵⁵ Then, Chen poetically wrote:

Green and red are reflected on the jade-colored gauze,	翠翠紅紅映碧紗，
Orioles and swallows are twittering about the tender	鶯鶯燕燕語蘭芽。
shoots of orchids.	
From the inner chamber, the children are all [talents]	閨房兒女皆千古，
through the ages.	

⁵⁴ For more on this group of male and female intellectuals, see Chung Hui-ling 鍾慧玲, "Chen Wenshu yu bicheng xianguan nüdizi de wenxue huodong 陳文述與碧城仙館女弟子的文學活動," *Donghai zhongwen xuebao* 東海中文學報 13 (July 2001): 151–82. His writings on Yuan Mei's female students are in his *Poems on Xiling Gentrywomen* (*Xiling guiyong* 西泠閨詠) that includes both brief biographies of these female intellectuals and Chen's poems on them. Chen Wenshu's *Xiling guiyong* is reprinted in *Congshu jicheng xubian* 叢書集成續編, vol. 64 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1994), 469–604.

⁵⁵ Among the five sisters, the two most erudite ones became palace instructors in the classics and history and served as consultants to the throne. Susan Mann, *Precious Records* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1997), 81.

[Becoming] relatives, the immortals are within one family.	眷屬神仙在一家。
On a painted boat together roaming, the clouds join their troop.	畫舫同游雲合隊，
On a jade tower joined in singing, the moon glows.	瓊樓聯唱月生華。
Heavenly fragrance and national beauty, [being recorded in] the <i>Registry of Fragrances</i> ,	天香國色群芳譜，
Are all flower-like sisters in the spring breeze.	都是春風姊妹花。 ⁵⁶

The poem begins with the components of the Sun family garden and uses the phrase “tender shoots of orchids” to hint at the literary abilities of the Sun sisters.⁵⁷ According to Chen, the talents in this family are so exceptional that they all seem to be immortals.⁵⁸ And since they appear like flowers, they should be recorded in the *Registry of Fragrances*.

Chen Wenshu describes the beauty and literary talents of another student, Yan Ruizhu, more explicitly. His entry about Yan begins with a brief biography, mentioning her early talents in poetry, her fame as a beauty, and her early death, before marriage. Then, Chen’s poem reads:

Absolutely similar to Ye Xiaoluan in those years,	絕似當年葉小鸞，
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⁵⁶ Chen Wenshu, “Xiangyunguan huai Sun Yunhe Yunluan Yunhong Yunhu Yunxian 湘筠館懷孫雲鶴雲鸞雲鴻雲鵠雲鷗,” in *Xiling guiyong*, *juan* 13, 575.

⁵⁷ In a Northern Song (960–1127) text, the author comments on the elegance of a poem by comparing it to the “tender shoots of orchids.” “Du Qingchang shizhou 讀慶長詩軸,” in Huihong 惠洪, *Shimen wenzi chan* 石門文字禪, *juan* 2, reprinted in *Chanmen yishu* 禪門逸書, vol. 4 (Taipei: Mingwen shuju, 1980), 22.

⁵⁸ Wang Yuru 王玉如, a concubine of Sun Jiale, was also a writer and painter. Yuan Mei included one of her poems in *Suiyuan shihua buyi* 隨園詩話補遺, *juan* 1, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 3, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 554.

In her <i>Fragrance of a Return Life</i> , [one] sees her elegant demeanor.	返生香裡見珊珊。
The waves of the cherry lake are still, their cold suitable for rinsing.	櫻湖波靜寒宜漱，
The flowers of the pear village are lovely, their beauty can be eaten.	梨里花嬌秀可餐。
Among the poems that sing of snow, [the one by Xie Daoyun that plays on] the willow catkin is elevated.	詠雪詩中推柳絮，
In the <i>Registry of Fragrances</i> [is] this secluded orchid.	群芳譜上此幽蘭。
Heard in seclusion who records the matter of three reincarnations	窈聞誰記三生事，
Under the setting sun and pine shade by an old altar.	斜日松陰下古壇。 ⁵⁹

The poem begins by comparing Yan Ruizhu to the late Ming female writer Ye Xiaoluan (1616–32) who also died young but left her writings, *Fragrance of a Return Life* (*Fanshen xiang* 返生香).⁶⁰ The next two lines praise Yan Ruizhu’s quiet disposition and beauty by likening her to the “waves of the cherry lake” and the “flowers of the pear village.” Xie Daoyun, the female poet famous for her quick wit when asked to incant on snow, is mentioned in the fifth line to compliment Yan’s literary talents. Like the Sun sisters, Yan’s flower-like beauty qualified her to be listed in the *Registry of Fragrances*.

⁵⁹ Chen Wenshu, “Zizhulin huai Yan Ruizhu 紫竹林懷嚴蕊珠,” in *Xiling guiyong*, *juan* 12, 570–71.

⁶⁰ For information about Ye Xiaoluan in English and translations of her poem, see Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush*, 390–406. Yan Ruizhu left behind *Manuscripts of Luhua Tower* (*Luhualou gao* 露華樓稿).

When writing about Wu Rouzhi 吳柔之 and Pan Suxin, Chen Wenshu emphasizes the women's marriages, which he considered unions of "talent and beauty" (*caizi jiaren*), following the late-imperial Chinese ideal of matching male scholars with educated beauties:

Qiantang landscape is itself pure and beautiful.	錢塘山水自清妍,
Who composes for the <i>se</i> instruments in unison and tunes their strings?	誰譜同聲瑟調弦.
The talent and beauty both have blessings and wisdom.	才子佳人雙福慧,
The gold boy and jade girl have fateful coincidence in marriage.	金童玉女美姻緣.
To the [height of her] eyebrows, [she] raises the [food] tray by the makeup box. ⁶¹	齊眉案舉香奩畔,
Holding hands, [they] chant poems in front of the vanity.	攜手詩吟鏡檻前.
Completely rid of the resentment of young men and women from the inner chamber,	消盡閨房兒女恨,
The famous flower is forever fine and the moon forever rounded.	名花長好月長圓. ⁶²

⁶¹ The phrase, "to the eyebrows, raises the tray," comes from the story of the Eastern Han scholar Liang Hong 梁鴻 and his wife Meng Guang 孟光 and is used to describe a woman showing love through respect. Fan Ye 范曄, "Liang Hong zhuan 梁鴻傳," in *Houhanshu* 後漢書 (Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 113.8b.

⁶² Chen Wenshu, "Qiantang yong Wu Rouzhi Pan Suxin 錢塘詠吳柔之潘素心," in *Xiling guiyong*, *juan* 13, 575.

In Chinese culture, the harmonious music played by the *qin* and *se* 瑟 zithers, the latter mentioned in the second line, symbolizes a blissful marriage.⁶³ From Chen’s perspective, these two marriages were composed of compatible men and women, a “talent and beauty” or a “gold boy and jade girl.”⁶⁴ As suggested by the fifth and sixth lines, these enviable marriages resulted from mutual love, respect, and shared literary interests.

To describe Yuan Mei’s students, the colophon writers used terms similar to those found in Qing-period inscriptions on paintings of beauties. One example is *Zhang Yiniang Wearing Flowers in Her Hair* 張憶娘簪花圖, a painting that depicts a beautiful Suzhou courtesan during the early years of the Kangxi reign (1654–1722), pinning a flower in her hair.⁶⁵ Yuan Mei was among the scholars who composed for this portrait, referring to Zhang as the “colorful cloud” (*caiyun* 彩雲) and the “red sleeve” (*hongxiu* 紅袖); to suggest that Yuan Mei’s students are beauties, the colophon writers use the phrases “cloud immortals” (*yunxian* 雲仙) and “red cosmetics” (*hongzhuang* 紅妝).⁶⁶ The phrase “wearing flowers” (*zanhua* 簪花) describes the courtesan’s pose to make herself attractive: “Unrolling the painting, still, [one can see Zhang

⁶³ This reference can be found in the *Book of Poetry*. For an English version of the text, see James Legge, trans., “Fa Mu 伐木,” in *The Book of Poetry: Chinese Text with English Translation*, 187–90.

⁶⁴ The “gold boys” and “jade girls” are Daoist and Buddhist attendants. One reference related to Buddhism is seen in a Southern Song text about eighteen arhats. Ma Tingluan 馬廷鸞 (died 1289), “Dongping jingshe shiba aluohan zunzhe zhenzan 東平精舍十八阿羅漢尊者真贊,” in *Biwu wanfang ji* 碧梧玩芳集 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1975), 16.12a. In a Yuan-period poem, the two are attendants to the Old Man of the South Pole 南極老人. Pu Daoyuan 蒲道源, “Laorenxing tu shou Deheng di 老人星圖壽德衡弟,” in *Xianju congkao* 閑居叢稿, *juan 2* (Taipei: Guoli zhongyang tushuguan, 1970), 184.

⁶⁵ Information about this painting is from two texts: Yuan Mei, “Ti Zhang Yiniang zanhua tu 題張憶娘簪花圖,” in *Xiaocangshan fang shiji* 小倉山房詩集, *juan 7*, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 1, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 109; Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua*, *juan 6*, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 3, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 200–01.

⁶⁶ Mourning the passing of some colophon writers and the courtesan, Yuan Mei wrote: “Blue robes and the red sleeve are all scattered” 青衫紅袖都零落. The phrase “blue robes” stands for the male writers. Another line reads, “Red and blue pigments retain the flying colorful cloud” 丹青留住彩雲飛, meaning that the portrait captures the image of the courtesan.

Yiniang] wearing flowers and smiling” 開圖且自簪花笑. In the *Thirteen Female Disciples* colophon, the phrase stands for Yuan Mei’s beautiful students.

Female writers also utilized words that male writers frequently chose for paintings of beauties. As mentioned earlier, the phrase “moth eyebrows” (*mei* 蛾眉) signified a beautiful woman. In her composition “Picture of A Beauty Facing A Mirror” 美人對鑑圖, Yuan Mei’s student Xi Peilan includes the phrases “pair of moth [eyebrows]” (*shuangmei* 雙蛾) and “deep inner chamber” (*shengui* 深閨) to portray a woman applying makeup in front of a mirror.⁶⁷ In “Picture of A Secluded Beauty Under Bright Moon” 月明林下美人圖, Xi employs the phrase “jade person” and the conventional equation of women and flowers: “The jade person stands for a while under the plum blossoms; [her] disposition is as pure as the flowers” 玉人暫立梅華下, 神與梅華一樣清.⁶⁸ In addition to being a synonym for a beautiful woman, the phrase refers to a female immortal; Yuan Mei’s students are also called “jade girls” by Chen Wenshu.⁶⁹

4.3 The Less-Idealized Representation of Yuan Mei’s Students in *Thirteen Female Disciples*

In the Ming and Qing dynasties, many artists specialized in painting beautiful women, and pictures of famous female writers, artists, and entertainers became very popular. These works were likely the visual resources for the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll due to their

⁶⁷ Xi Peilan, “Meiren duijian tu 美人對鑑圖,” in *Changzhenge ji* 長真閣集, *juan* 3, reprinted in *Jiangnan nüxing bieji* 江南女性別集, *chubian shangce* 初編上冊, ed. Hu Xiaoming 胡曉明 and Peng Guozhong 彭國忠 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2008), 488.

⁶⁸ Xi Peilan, “Ti yueming linxia meiren tu 題月明林下美人圖,” in *Changzhenge ji* 長真閣集, *juan* 1, 435.

⁶⁹ The use of “jade person” to signify a beauty is seen in a poem by the Tang poet Du Mu 杜牧. Du Mu, “Ji Yangzhou Han Chuo panguan 寄揚州韓綽判官,” reprinted in *Quan Tangshi*, *juan* 523, 1327. The use of the phrase to signify a female immortal is seen in another poem by Du Mu. Du Mu, “Ji mindi yu Yuwen sheren 寄珉笛與宇文舍人,” reprinted in *Quan Tangshi*, *juan* 523, 1327.

subject matter and the popular conception of Yuan Mei's students as beauties. However, the creators of the main painting depicted this group of female talents largely as less idealized, self-contained individuals and avoided some of the pictorial conventions of ideal-beauty paintings. The most significant departures can be seen by comparing the paintings' implied gender relations, degree of individualization of figures, depicted activities, and coded messages of certain objects and motifs.

In paintings that depict conventional male-female relationships, women are often shown as dependent on a male protagonist, and the viewer interprets their activities in relation to men. *Yao Xie Repenting for Past Romance* 姚燮懺綺圖 (fig. 4.6), a portrait of the Qing scholar Yao Xie (1805–64), is one typical example, in which the gentleman enjoys the company of thirteen beauties.⁷⁰ The placement of the women highlights Yao Xie's position, as they are surrounding or walking toward him. In addition, Yao is the only one seated, suggesting his higher status, as being attended to. The Qing handscroll *Three Pleasures of Qiao Yuanzhi* 喬元之三好圖 (fig. 4.7) shows a scholar reclining by a desk and enjoying books, wine, and music, close to the center of the composition.⁷¹ Of the three pleasures depicted, two are provided by women: three beautifully dressed entertainers in the lower left play music, and two attendants in the lower right bring a large container of wine. These paintings depict the women in subservient roles while the men receive affection and services.

By contrast, the gender relationship in the *Thirteen Female Disciples* painting is unconventional: the women are shown absorbed in their own activities even as a male figure is

⁷⁰ This handscroll is in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing. For reproductions, see Yang Xin 楊新, *Ming Qing xiaoxianghua* 明清肖像畫 (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2008), 232–33.

⁷¹ This handscroll is in the collection of the Nanjing Museum. For reproductions, see Nanjing bowuyuan 南京博物院, *Ming Qing renwu xiaoxianghua xuan* 明清人物肖像畫選 (Shanghai: Xinhua shudian, 1982), plates 34–7.

present. In other words, they do not pursue scholarly activities to entertain men but rather for their own enjoyment, to amuse each other, and to advance their own literary and artistic skills. Yuan Mei sits in a pavilion at the end of the composition; the woman by his side is identified by his first inscription as a relative. Due to the physical distance and architectural boundary between him and the students, the viewer is less likely to identify these women as lovers, servants, or entertainers.

Originating from male imaginations and representing male desires and standards of beauty, most paintings of idealized beauties present elaborately dressed, youthful women. In paintings that depict multiple female figures, their attire and activities may vary, but the women are usually homogenous. For example, in the Qing painting *Female Pursuits of the Four Seasons* (fig. 4.1), which shows a domestic scene in an upper-class family, all of the women have small facial features, similar hair coils, flawless egg-shape faces, sloping shoulders covered by many layers of robes, and tiny feet that have been bound. Though their robes are differently colored, their faces and physical features are similar enough to make them look as if they are the same person in many guises.

In contrast, the women in the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll look like individuals who existed in real life. Yuan Mei's students have less idealized faces, with varied facial features. Some have visible signs of aging and look older than others. For example, Wang Shen, the one who inscribes a banana leaf, appears to be the oldest in her group due to her taller stature and more pronounced facial lines. Such physical appearances are more realistic and enable the viewer to better appreciate the women as scholarly poets and artists.

Pictures of idealized beauties often show their subjects engaging in culturally sanctioned feminine pursuits, as seen in two Qing handscrolls, *Female Pursuits of the Four Seasons* (fig.

4.1) and *Ladies on the “Night of Sevens” Pleading for Skills* 乞巧圖 (fig. 4.8).⁷² In the third section of the former, several women are shown sewing, fulling, washing, and drying clothes—laborious autumn activities, to prepare for the coming winter. It is unclear for whom these women are performing these tasks, as there is no dominant figure; viewed from the perspective of Chinese poets, who romanticized such activities, they worked for lovers or husbands far from home, in particular those in the army stationed on China’s borders.⁷³ Therefore, these activities were considered feminine, and their representations were coded with sentiments of longing and melancholy.⁷⁴ The beauties in the latter painting are praying and offering wine and fruit, to plead for needlework skills from the goddess Weaving Girl (*zhinü* 織女) on the Double Seventh Festival (*qixi* 七夕).⁷⁵ Needlework was considered womanly work; the painting thus depicts feminine activities and a women’s festival.

As discussed in chapter 3, the *Thirteen Female Disciples* painting depicts a female version of a typically male social activity, the “elegant gathering,” that signified the cultivation of the literati. Unlike pictures of idealized beauties, the painting portrays women occupied by various scholarly activities—including Xi Peilan playing *qin*, Wang Shen writing calligraphy, and Liao Yunjin painting—and thus is a women’s “elegant-gathering picture.”

Beautiful-woman paintings are often coded with eroticism, messages that can be recognized through familiarity with Chinese culture, literature, and established pictorial tradition. Ellen Johnston Laing interprets the butterfly and the fan with a peony motif as erotic signs in the

⁷² The latter handscroll is in the collection of the Shanghai Museum. For reproductions, see Shane McCausland, *Telling Images of China: Narrative and Figure Paintings, 15th–20th century from the Shanghai Museum* (London: Scala, 2010), 86–9.

⁷³ Ellen Johnston Laing, “Erotic Themes and Romantic Heroines Depicted by Ch’iu Ying,” *Archives of Asian Art* 49 (1996): 75.

⁷⁴ Examples of poems about women preparing clothes can be found in Anne Birrell, trans., *New Songs from a Jade Terrace*, 101, 105–06, 144–45, 147, and 166–67.

⁷⁵ For reproductions of this work, see McCausland, *Telling Images of China*, 89–9.

Tang picture *Court Ladies Wearing Flowered Headdresses* (fig. 4.9); the butterfly symbolizes a man, and the peony was a symbol for female genitalia.⁷⁶ In James Cahill's reading of a Qing painting showing eight courtesans (fig. 4.10), the Buddha's Hand fruit, in addition to the flowers and a fan with butterflies, is another erotic indicator.⁷⁷ This citrus is also shown in a Qing hanging scroll, *Beautiful Woman in an Interior, with a Dog* (fig. 4.11). In addition to the fruit, the figure's posture is sexually suggestive: she has placed her right knee on a stool, and the resulting folds of her gown direct the viewer's gaze to her genital area. Given the implied eroticism of such paintings, men were likely the intended viewers, and the paintings' subjects were probably courtesans or female entertainers since it was not proper for upper-class women to be portrayed in such a fashion.

The larger painting of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll lacks postures, objects, and motifs coded with erotic messages. Yuan Mei's students all sit or stand properly, wearing modest robes that entirely cover their bodies. The objects they use or hold—including a book, writing utensils, and a *qin*—all suggest their capabilities in traditionally male rather than female pastimes. Although some of their postures also appear in paintings of beautiful women, the elegant-gathering theme overrides sexual implications. For example, Wang Zuanzu holds up an orchid blossom, a plant favored by Chinese literati and courtesans. To the former, it symbolizes moral virtue; to the latter, it stands for beauties flowering in pure seclusion.⁷⁸ Her less idealized physical appearance and identity as a poet encourage the interpretation of the flower as a symbol

⁷⁶ Laing, "Erotic Themes and Romantic Heroines Depicted by Ch'iu Ying," 68. This handscroll is in the collection of the Liaoning Provincial Museum.

⁷⁷ Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure*, 32.

⁷⁸ This symbolism arises from the plant's association with the poet and government official Qu Yuan (340–278 BCE). Fang Jing Pei, *Symbols and Rebuses in Chinese Art: Figures, Bugs, Beasts, and Flowers* (Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed, 2004), 139. For the plant as a courtesans' frequent painting subject, see Ellen Johnston Laing, "Women Painters in Traditional China," in *Flowering in the Shadows: Women in the History of Chinese and Japanese Painting*, ed. Marsha Weidner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1990), 91.

of poetic enlightenment. Jiang Xingbao leans toward and grasps a bamboo stem, appearing to be in deep thought. Though her pose is similar to those of beauties presumed to be thinking of love or waiting for an absent lover, the theme of the painting leads the viewer to consider it more likely that Jiang is contemplating her verses. Jin Yi walks across a bridge toward Yuan Mei while holding a round fan. This object was often used to capture butterflies, a suitable activity for beauties, as mentioned in chapter 3, and it was also a symbol of conjugal pleasure.⁷⁹ But again, the painting's theme directs the viewer's interpretation of the fan as an arbitrary accessory that Jin holds on her way to seek instruction on poetry, not as a tool for feminine frivolity or as an erotic sign.

Because of the intended function of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll, its depiction of the women differed from that of idealized beauties. Many paintings of beautiful women were meant as interior decorations and enjoyed for personal pleasure.⁸⁰ The coded eroticism of these pictures enticed and satisfied the imaginations of their owners.⁸¹ As discussed in chapter 2, Yuan Mei's interactions with his female disciples were criticized by his contemporaries: they surmised that he preferred beautiful women as students and that he had impure relationships with them. By commemorating an historical event, the 1792 poetry gathering, Yuan Mei could present his

⁷⁹ The round fan is also called the "conjugal-pleasure fan" (*hehuan shan* 合歡扇). Lee Chun-yi, "Hidden Meaning of Love," in *Hidden Meaning of Love and Death in Chinese Painting: Selections from the Marilyn and Roy Papp Collection* (Phoenix, AZ: Phoenix Art Museum, 2013), 38.

⁸⁰ Both textual and visual accounts record the decorative use of beautiful-woman paintings. For example, as suggested by the late Ming scholar Wen Zhenheng 文震亨 (1585–45), paintings of ladies enjoying spring walks were appropriate decorations for the second month of the lunar calendar. For a translation, see Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure*, 15. The Qing scholar Wang Zhuo 王晫 (1636–after 1705) recorded purchasing a picture of a beautiful woman and hanging it in his bedchamber. Judith T. Zeitlin, "The Life and Death of the Image: Ghosts and Portraits in Chinese Literature," in *Body and Faces in Chinese Culture*, ed. Wu Hung and Katherine Tsiang (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), 231. For Wang Zhuo's enjoyment of the picture, see 233–34. In *Li Jiao'er and Three Others in a Bordello*, an album leaf illustrating an episode from the novel *The Plum in the Golden Vase* 金瓶梅, a painting of a beauty is hung on the wall behind a table. For a reproduction, see Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure*, 160.

⁸¹ For more on how people enjoyed beautiful-woman paintings, see James Cahill, "Where Did the Nymph Hang?" *Kaikodo Journal* VII (Spring 1998): 8–16.

students as writers and artists and promote his position as a progressive educator sought by many women for scholarly guidance. While the scroll was in circulation, viewers of the main painting were encouraged to interpret the depicted women as self-contained individuals, accepted and appreciated by Yuan Mei for their literary and artistic talents.

Conclusion

Many of Yuan Mei's female students are known as writers and painters through their poetry anthologies and extant paintings. Yet, as shown in the Qing-period writings by their contemporaries, they are imagined to be beauties with literary and artistic talents, like the subjects of beautiful-woman paintings. These representations cast them as ideal companions for male scholars who defined feminine beauty through physical appearance and capabilities in cultural activities. Such portrayals, however, correspond to the supposition that Yuan Mei had less than honorable intentions and undermine the women's integrity and their scholarly abilities and achievements. In contrast, the painters of *Thirteen Female Disciples* present an unconventional depiction of a man in the company of women. The scroll's various artistic choices—the architectural boundary, the physical distance between teacher and students, the suppression of erotic symbols, the less idealized faces of the students—discourage an interpretation of the women as dependent lovers or concubines and emphasize their nature as self-contained individuals. Despite the apparently unavoidable adoption of poses and motifs from beautiful-woman painting, the scroll still encourages the viewer to focus on the literary and artistic endeavors that identify the women as learned persons rather than as objects of male desire.

Chapter Five: Study of the Colophons and Issues of “Authenticity”

This chapter examines the colophons in the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll. To convey the context of Yuan Mei’s social circle and how the writers perceived his associations with his female students, I begin with a study of the authors’ identities, the dates and reasons for the inscriptions, and the contents of the texts. I then turn to issues raised by the existence of multiple versions of *Thirteen Female Disciples*. While the paintings and inscriptions were originally done for Yuan Mei, the multiples are explained by the Chinese copying practices. The chapter looks at the attendant concerns of authenticity, taking into account Qing sources and modern scholarship on the different versions.

5.1 The Colophons of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* Scroll

The handscroll *Thirteen Female Disciples* survives today as versions in the Suzhou Museum, Shanghai Museum, and Zhejiang Provincial Museum.¹ In addition, one was sold through the Christie’s auction house in 2010.² The compositions of the two paintings in these four versions are identical, and most of the colophon authors and contents are the same though the positions of a few texts vary. The colophons in the Zhejiang scroll were all written with

¹ For reproductions of the Shanghai Museum version, see these two books: Shane McCausland, *Telling Images of China: Narrative and Figure Paintings, 15th–20th Century, From the Shanghai Museum* (London: Scala, 2010), 144–47; Akita Shiritsu Chiaki Bijutsukan 秋田市立千秋美術館, *Shanghai Hakubutsukan Ten: Chūgoku bunjin no sekai: Nitchū kokkō seijōka sanjissūnen kinen* 上海博物館展: 中国文人の世界: 日中国交正常化三十周年記念 (Tōkyō: Yomiuri Shinbunsha, 2002), 88–89 and 142–45. To my knowledge, the Suzhou Museum version has never been published. For the Zhejiang Provincial Museum version, see Xie Jun 谢钧, *Chuanshen adu: Ming Qing renwuhua jingpin zhan* 传神阿堵: 明清人物画精品展 (Nanning: Guangxi meishu chubanshe, 2011), 160–63.

² The Christie’s version was sold May 28, 2010, in Hong Kong, for \$1,534,960. Information and pictures of this scroll are available on the Christie’s website, <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/paintings/yuan-mei-you-zhao-18th-5321424-details.aspx?from=salesummary&pos=1&intObjectID=5321424&sid=44d3c89b-cdf7-4da1-94ce-16747c178661&page=1&lid=1>.

characters of similar sizes and writing styles on the same kinds of paper. As for the other three versions, most of the texts by Yuan Mei's contemporaries were inscribed in various calligraphic styles on the same kinds of paper, and several were placed on smaller, separate sheets of paper in different colors and sizes. Excluding Yuan Mei's two inscriptions, as shown in published reproductions, the Shanghai Museum version has thirty-one colophons, all by Yuan's contemporaries. The Suzhou Museum and Zhejiang Provincial Museum versions each contain four additional colophons by different groups of writers, and the Christie's version has five; all of these were written during later eras.³ The variation in the later texts and authors suggests that the scrolls were owned by different collectors.

Based on the identities of the writers and the dates of the inscriptions, the colophons can be divided into three groups: those by male literati directly or tangentially associated with the

³ Some colophons became known through published texts in which the scroll is referred to by various titles. Zhang Yun'ao 張雲璈 called it "Suiyuan's Female Disciples Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion" (*Suiyuan nüdizi hulou qingye tu* 隨園女弟子湖樓請業圖). Zhang Yun'ao, "Ti suiyuan nüdizi hulou qingye tu 題隨園女弟子湖樓請業圖," in *Jiansong caotang shiji* 簡松草堂詩集, *juan* 14, reprinted in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書, vol. 1471 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), 470. Guo Kun 郭壘 referred to it as "Sir Suiyuan's Thirteen Female Disciples Receiving Instruction" (*Suiyuan xiansheng shisan nüdizi shouye tu* 隨園先生十三女弟子受業圖). Guo Kun, "Suiyuan xiansheng shisan nüdizi shouye tu 隨園先生十三女弟子受業圖," in *Zhongjiaoguan shiji* 種蕉館詩集, *juan* 2, reprinted in *Qingdai shiwenji huibian*, vol. 471 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010), 81. Liang Tongshu 梁同書 titled the work "Sir Suiyuan's Female Disciples Seeking Instruction" (*Suiyuan xiansheng nüdizi qingye tu* 隨園先生女弟子請業圖). Liang Tongshu, "Ti Suiyuan xiansheng nüdizi qingyetu juan 題隨園先生女弟子請業圖卷," in *Pinluoan yiji* 頻羅庵遺集, *juan* 3, reprinted in *Xuxiu siku quanshu*, vol. 1445 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), 427. Wu Qiongxián named it "Thirteen Female Disciples Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion" (*shisan nüdizi hulou qingye tu* 十三女弟子湖樓請業圖). Wu Qiongxián's colophon consists of a series of five poems, and Yuan Mei included three in *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan*, *juan* 6, in *Yuan Mei quanji*, vol. 7, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 145. In a few cases there are minor discrepancies between the published transcriptions and the colophons on the surviving scrolls, ranging from a single character to the whole line of a poem. The colophon by Zhang Yun'ao contains a line: "One generation of people come and vie to be on intimate terms with the wise" 一人爭御李來. The phrase, "one generation," is written as *yishi* 一世 in the painting colophons but as *yidai* 一代 in the printed text. For Wu Qiongxián's colophon, the second line in the third poem is printed as: "The moon's two ends, when would they join in completeness" 月子兩頭那得圓. However, the same line in the colophon is written as: "Looking back at Xujiang, [I] temporarily feel dejected" 回首胥江一惘然. This poem is about the female disciples whom Wu did not have a chance to meet, in particular Jin Yi 金逸, who had already passed away. Both lines correspond to the content: the former expresses the desire to encounter one another and the latter the sadness, perhaps of being unable to have the wish realized. Thus, the variation could be revisions made by the writer prior to having the text published.

circle of Yuan Mei, those by Yuan Mei's female disciples and female relatives, and those added by later viewers and collectors of the scrolls. The first and largest group comprises colophons by men: Xiong Mei 熊枚 (1734–1808), Zeng Ao, Wang Chang 王昶 (1725–1806), Hu Sen, Yu Guojian, Wu Weiguang, Zhang Yun'ao, Qinglin 慶霖 (died 1806), Wang Wenzhi 王文治 (1730–1802), Liu Xi 劉熙, Wang Mingsheng 王鳴盛 (1722–97), Kang Kai 康愷, Li Tingjing 李廷敬 (died 1806), Dong Xun 董洵 (1740–1812), Liang Tongshu, Guo Kun, Cheng Ce, An Sheng'e 安盛額, Yu Aotu, Xu Xi 徐熾, Chen Tingqing 陳廷慶 (1754–1813), Zhang Pu 張溥, and Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728–1804). Yuan Mei's writings document his associations with many of these men.

The female colophon writers, or the second group, are: Gui Maoyi, Yuan Shufang 袁淑芳, Xi Peilan, Yan Ruizhu, Wu Qiongqian, Dai Lanying, and Wang Huifang 王蕙芳. Among them, only Xi Peilan, Yan Ruizhu, and Dai Lanying appear in the larger painting. These texts add to evidence from printed texts of the associations between Yuan Mei and these women. By requesting these colophons, Yuan Mei invited these female students to participate in a traditionally male social exchange.⁴

The third group, or later writers, is varied across the three versions since they were owned and appreciated by different collectors and viewers. The Christie's version includes

⁴ Yuan Mei's students also composed for other paintings in his collection, and many writings remain in his publications. Therefore, requesting inscriptions from talented women was not unusual for Yuan Mei. Sun Yunfeng, Sun Yunhe, Luo Qilan, and Qian Mengdian 錢孟鈿 all wrote for *Elegant Gathering in the Harmony Garden* 隨園雅集圖. For Sun Yunfeng and Sun Yunhe, see Yuan Mei, *Xiaocangshan fang shiji* 小倉山房詩集, *juan* 32, reprinted in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 1, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 788. For Qian Mengdian, see *Xu tongren ji* 續同人集, *guixiu lei* 閩秀類, reprinted in *Yuan Mei quanji*, vol. 6, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 241. For Luo Qilan, see *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan* 隨園女弟子詩選, *juan* 3, 59–60. Sun Yunfeng, Luo Qilan, Qian Lin, Pan Suxin, and Jin Dui 金兌 all composed for *Returning for Wedding* 歸娶圖. For Sun Yunfeng, Pan Suxin, and Jin Dui, see *Xu tongren ji*, *guixiu lei*, 231 and 237. For Luo Qilan and Qian Lin, see *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan*, 60 and 94.

colophons by Zhou Rulin 周汝霖, Huang Antao 黃安濤 (1777–1848), Zhang Pengling 張彭齡, Hua Qiupin 華秋蘋, and a gentleman with the surname Li 李 and art name Zhisong 穉松. The Suzhou Museum version contains colophons by Shen Wenyuan 沈文淵, Qian Yuanzhang 錢元章, Chen Hao 陳浩, Zhu Chengxi 朱承禧, Lu Xie 陸燮, and Yu Xihao 郁熙灝. The Zhejiang scroll features Yan Liangqiu 嚴良秋, Zhang Ditong 張棣通, Hu Zhen 胡珍, and a woman with the surname He 何.⁵ These texts show that after the death of Yuan Mei, these scrolls continued to spread knowledge of the 1792 poetry gathering, promoting both the image of Yuan Mei as a supporter of talented women and the reputations of his female disciples as artists and poets.

Ten of Yuan Mei's contemporaries dated their colophons with the Chinese cyclic year or mention their ages. Xi Peilan wrote: "During the Jiaqing reign, in the *bingchen* year and second month of winter, Master Suiyuan [Yuan Mei] came to Yu, brought out *Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion*, and asked [that I] inscribe [it]" 嘉慶丙辰仲冬隨園夫子來虞, 出湖樓請業圖命題; the corresponding Western calendar year was 1796. Wang Mingsheng cited his age as seventy-six years by Chinese count, which leads to the year 1797. Eight of the colophons were composed in 1796, one in 1797, and one, by Qinglin, in 1798.⁶ Since these writings are interspersed between other colophons by Yuan's contemporaries, it is likely that most of this whole group of inscriptions was created between 1796 and 1797, soon after the completion of the painting or before the death of Yuan Mei at the end of 1797.

The social status and public identity of the writers in the first group vary, indicating that Yuan Mei had a diverse social circle. Many were high-ranking scholars. Wang Wenzhi, Liang

⁵ The catalogue from which I derived the names of the colophon writers is inconsistent with the given name of Ms. He; she is called both He Peiyu 何佩玉 and He Peilan 何佩蘭. Thus, she is referred to as Ms. He in this dissertation.

⁶ The eight are Wang Chang, Wu Weiguang, Liang Tongshu, Cheng Ce, Yu Aotu, Yuan Shufang, and Xi Peilan.

Tongshu, Xiong Mei, Qian Daxin, and Wang Mingsheng held the title of Presented Scholar (*jinshi* 進士), the highest academic degree conferred by the civil examination.⁷ Zhang Yun'ao, Guo Kun, Yu Aotu, and Kang Kai achieved the lower academic title of Recommender (*jüren* 舉人).⁸ These scholarly accomplishments qualified them for civil positions in the government. Qinglin, in contrast, held several military-related posts.⁹ Dong Xun was a famous seal artist.¹⁰ Collectively these men constituted a crucial network through which Yuan Mei's female students became known.

Similar to Yuan Mei, several of these men supported educated women by accepting them as disciples. They also interacted with female writers and artists by exchanging letters with them, inscribing their paintings, and composing prefaces for their publications. For example, both Wang Chang and Wang Wenzhi accepted as a student Luo Qilan, the woman wearing orchids in the smaller painting of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll.¹¹ Zeng Ao, Li Tingjing, Wang

⁷ For information on Wang Wenzhi and Liang Tongshu, see *Qingshigao liezhuan* 清史稿列傳, *yishuzhuan er* 藝術傳二, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian* 三十三種清代人物傳記資料彙編, vol.3 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 303. For information of Xiong Mei, see *Qingshigao liezhuan* 清史稿列傳, *liezhuan yibai sishisi* 列傳一百四十四, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian*, vol.2 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 136–37. For Qian Daxin and Wang Mingsheng, see *Qingshigao liezhuan* 清史稿列傳, *rulinzhuan* 儒林傳, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian*, vol.3 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 112–13.

⁸ For information on Zhang Yun'ao, see *Qingshi liezhuan* 清史列傳, *wenyuanzhuan san* 文苑傳三, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian*, vol. 6 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 444. For Guo Kun and Yu Aotu, see Wang Chang, *Puheshan fang shihua* 蒲褐山房詩話 (Taipei: Guangwen shuju youxian gongsi, 1973), 283 and 201. For Kang Kai, see Li Junzhi, *Qing huajia shishi* 清畫家詩史, *wuxia* 戊下, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian*, vol. 40 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 271.

⁹ For Qinglin's biography, see Li Huan 李桓, *Guochao qixian leizheng* 國朝耆獻類徵, *juan sanbaiyi* 卷三百一, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian*, vol. 20 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 164–65.

¹⁰ For Dong Xun's biography, see Wang Qishu 汪啟淑, *Feihongtang yinren zhuan* 飛鴻堂印人傳, *juan 4*, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian*, vol. 42 (Jinan: Qilu shu she, 2009), 282.

¹¹ Feng Jinbo 馮金伯, *Moxiangju huashi* 墨香居畫識, *juan 9*, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian* 三十三種清代人物傳記資料彙編, vol. 43 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 108. Luo Qilan mentioned Yuan Mei, Wang Wenzhi, and Wang Chang as her teachers in her preface to *Poems to the Tingqiu Studio from My Companions in Women's Quarter* (*Tingqiuxuan guizhong tongren ji* 聽秋軒閨中同人集). Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan guizhong tongren ji* 聽秋軒閨中同人集, in *Jiangnan nüxing bieji* 江南女性別集, *erbian shangce* 二編上冊, ed. Hu Xiaoming 胡曉明 and Peng Guozhong 彭國忠 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2010), 695.

Wenzhi, and Hu Sen all wrote on Luo Qilan's painting, *Tutoring My Daughter by the Autumn Lamp* 秋燈課女圖.¹² And Chen Tingqing composed an inscription for a painting by Liao Yunjin, who appears in the larger painting.¹³ In addition to documenting the scholars' viewing and circulation of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll, the colophons record a group of similarly minded literati who shared a positive attitude toward female talents. By composing colophons for the scroll, these authors celebrated with Yuan Mei their support of learned women.

The female colophon authors, who were related to male literati by birth or marriage, are known primarily as writers, but some are also remembered as painters. The *Anthology of Correct Beginning by Boudoir Talents of Our Dynasty* (*Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji* 國朝閨秀正史集), compiled by the female writer Yun Zhu 惲珠 (1771–1833), contains representative writings and brief biographies of all of them.¹⁴ Xi Peilan is further recorded in *Poetic History of Qing Painters* (*Qing huajia shishi* 清畫家詩史) as a skilled painter of orchids.¹⁵ Wu Qiongxiang is recorded in another late-Qing compilation, Tang Shuyu's *Jade Terrace Painting History* (*Yutai huashi* 玉臺畫史), which is devoted entirely to women painters.¹⁶

¹² Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan* 聽秋軒贈言, reprinted in *Jiangnan nüxing bieji erbian* 江南女性別集二編, *shangce* 上冊 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2010), 724, 727, 728, and 735.

¹³ Chen Tingqing, "Ti Zhiyun nüshi guilin tu 題織雲女史桂林圖," in *Qianshoutang quanji* 謙受堂全集, *juan* 12, reprinted in *Qingdai shiwenji huibian* 清代詩文集彙編, vol. 439 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010), 562.

¹⁴ Yun Zhu 惲珠, *Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji* 國朝閨秀正史集 (1831), 4.19a, 12.20b, 13.17a, 14.8b, 15.15a, and 15.19a. Yun Zhu (1771–1833), also known as Wanyan Yun Zhu 完顏惲珠, was a descendant of the Qing painter Yun Shouping 惲壽平 (1633–90). Kang-I Sun Chang and Huan Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China: An Anthology of Poetry and Criticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1999), 711. The Qing female painter Yun Bing 惲冰 (18th century) came from the same Yun family. For Yun Bing and her paintings, see Marsha Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists, 1300-1912* (Indianapolis, IN: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1988), 122–27.

¹⁵ Li Junzhi, *Qinghuajia shishi, guixia* 癸下, 499.

¹⁶ Tang Shuyu 湯漱玉, *Yutai huashi* 玉臺畫史, *juan* 3, reprinted in *Qingren huaxue lunzhu: xia* 清人畫學論著: 下 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 2009), 398.

Many of Yuan Mei's contemporaries, male and female, state that they composed colophons for the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll at his request. Their signatures are preceded by notes such as "[Yuan Mei] ordered [me] to inscribe" (*zhuti* 囑題), "[Yuan Mei] asked [that I] inscribe" (*mingti* 命題), or "Upon the order [of Yuan Mei], [I] inscribe" (*fengti* 奉題). These examples testify to Yuan Mei's eagerness to receive comments from his peers on the interaction between him and his students.

The later writers inscribed the scroll for various reasons: to record viewing or acquiring it, to express their admiration for Yuan Mei, or simply to comment on its content. In the Suzhou Museum version, Qian Yuanzhang wrote of appreciating the work in the company of Chen Hao, Zhu Chengxi, and Lu Xie. Yu Xihao wrote of purchasing this handscroll in 1855. Zhou Rulin reminisced about Yuan Mei:

Though the Master had passed away, his lasting fashion and remaining rhythm are still in the human realm. Whenever I chant his poems, I lament that I was born too late to be able to ascend to his dragon gate and be slightly moistened by his transforming rain... Then there is someone who carries this picture and shows it [to me]. Unrolling and viewing [the scroll, I feel] as if I am personally sensing the amiable face and smile [of the Master] and receiving [his] incoming spring wind... Perhaps Sir's spirit knows that after his death, there are still people who wish but are unable to see him. He thus leaves this picture to compensate for their sorrow.

先生雖逝，而流風餘韻猶在人間，霖每誦其詩，即嘆吾生也晚，不及一登龍門，稍沾化雨... 乃有攜茲圖相示者，展閱之下，如親色笑，如領春風向之... 抑公之靈知身後尚有求見不得之人，故貽此圖使補其恨耶。

Hua Qiupin, the nineteenth-century author of the last colophon in the Christie's version, documents his identification with Yuan Mei by transcribing and editing two poems composed by female relatives. In this way, he compares them to Yuan Mei's female disciples and himself to Yuan as an educator of women and promoter of their writings.¹⁷

The colophons have a good deal of content in common. The number thirteen recurs in various ways (thirteen strings 十三絃, thirteen people 十三人, thirteen families 十三家, and thirteen pavilions 十三樓) as plays on the thirteen students. This number also recalls the “thirteen Confucian classics” (*shisan jing* 十三經). Moreover, as Jeffrey Riegel observes, the importance of this number is seen in the fact that both the 1790 and 1792 poetry gatherings at Sun Jiale's lake pavilion fell on the thirteenth day of the fourth moon.¹⁸ References to the lake pavilion (*hulou* 湖樓) on West Lake, or to Precious Stone Villa (*baoshi shanzhuang* 寶石山莊), locate the gathering, and a few writers mention that more than one poetry gathering took place at Sun Jiale's lake pavilion. Liang Tongshu's line, “twice, by the spring lake, the painted boat anchored” 兩度春湖畫舸停, can be interpreted as meaning that Yuan Mei held two meetings at the lakeside property in the spring. An Sheng'e wrote, “Spring wind repeatedly comes to the lake

¹⁷ Hua Qiupin also wrote a seven-character quatrain and gave some historical context for his colophon, mentioning his previous viewing of this scroll in 1847, the purchase of the work by his friend Zhuzhai 竺齋, and Zhuzhai's requests for colophons from Huang Antao and Li Zhisong.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Riegel, “Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1798) and a Different ‘Elegant Gathering,’” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 32 (December 2010): 107.

pavilion” 春風重復到湖樓; the “spring wind” alludes to Yuan Mei’s instruction and therefore the man himself.¹⁹

Many of the colophons mention Yuan Mei’s support of women poets, his teaching, and the female students learning from him or seeking his instruction. On the students paying respect to Yuan, Yu Guojian wrote: “Talents with painted eyebrows lower their heads and bow” 掃眉才子低眉拜. According to Zhang Yun’ao, “With leftover strength [from finishing his main duty, Yuan Mei] also accepted female talents” 餘力還收女才子. Zhang also described the students bowing to Yuan Mei and referred to the women with the phrase “cloud-like hairdos” (*yunhuan* 雲鬟): “Same colored, cloud-like hairdos bow down deeply” 一色雲鬟下拜低. Wang Chang wrote: “[The women] drink tea and inscribe banana leaves while waiting for instruction” 賦茗題蕉待指南. Dai Lanying touched upon the diligence of the students: “At the lake pavilion, night after night, the sound of chanting poems [can be heard]” 湖樓夜夜哦詩聲. These writings correspond to the title and theme of the painting, complimenting Yuan Mei as an educator of women.

Colophons written by Yuan Mei’s female disciples express admiration for their teacher. Gui Maoyi’s is poetic:

...

A grand gathering at the lake pavilion is transmitted in 高會湖樓傳雅繪,
an elegant painting [that shows]

¹⁹ The allusion of “spring wind” to one’s virtue or grace, which can transform others, is from a conversation between Mengjianzi 孟簡子 and Guan Zhong 管仲, recorded in Liu Xiang 劉向, “Guide 貴德,” in *Shuoyuan* 說苑, (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1922), 5.15a.

Thirteen female disciples within “[his] gate and walls.” ²⁰	十三弟子在門牆。
[They] write freely on cloud-patterned paper and compete with the flowers’ gorgeousness.	雲牋揮灑爭花艷，
The ink is dripping wet and carries the fragrance of makeup-powder.	墨瀋淋漓帶粉香，
Carelessly dressing, [I] often smile to myself.	草草妝梳常自哂，
Harmonious jade bracelets and pendants are permitted to travel together.	雍雍環珮許同行。
Writing comments, [I] truly have the luck of three reincarnations.	品題真有三生幸，
For ten years, [I] have fallen in love in Xiaocang. ²¹	十載傾心在小倉。
...	

The “harmonious jade bracelets and pendants” in the sixth line refer to Yuan Mei’s female disciples. Thus, the line speaks of Gui Maoyi’s gratitude for being accepted as one of them, as she had been admiring Yuan for a long time.

The students in the scroll also received admiration from later viewers, as seen in one of the poems by Hua Qiupin’s female relatives:

²⁰ The word “gate and walls” symbolizes admission to teacher-disciple relationship. *Chongbian guoyu cidian* 重編國語辭典 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1981), 475.

²¹ “Xiaocang” refers to Yuan Mei, whose Harmony Garden was located on Mount Xiaocang. Yuan Mei, “Suiyuan ji 隨園記,” in *Xiaocangshan fang wenji* 小倉山房文集, *juan* 12, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 2, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 204.

<p>[I am] glad to learn that families connected by marriage have famous beauties. (Such as the various beauties of the Yushan Xi and Gui families.)²²</p> <p>Works of brush and ink handed down from the past reach young girls.</p> <p>[I] do not know the various female scholars in the scroll, To this day, are there still some of them or not? ([I would] reckon that those remaining must be in their eighties.)</p>	<p>歆聞姻黨有名姝， (如虞山席氏歸氏諸媛。)</p> <p>翰墨遺風到弱雛。</p> <p>未識卷中諸女士， 於今還有幾人無。 (計在世者當八十矣。)</p>
---	--

The colophons often compare the figures in the painting to exemplary precedents in Chinese history to compliment Yuan Mei as a teacher and his students as female talents. Guo Kun relates Yuan Mei to Fu Sheng 伏生, the Western Han (206 BCE–9 CE) scholar who protected and relayed the Confucian classic, *Shangshu* 尚書, with the assistance of his daughter.²³ Guo implies that the disciples are talented women by calling them *yongxu* 詠絮, literally “singing of willow catkins,” a term that refers to Xie Daoyun 謝道韞, the Eastern Jin (317–420) female poet who improvised a brilliant poetic line on falling snow.²⁴ Liu Xi likens

²² Xi Peilan is shown playing *qin* in the main painting; Gui Maoyi is one of the colophon writers.

²³ Fu Sheng hid *Shangshu* to save it when the First Emperor of Qin (r. 221–10 BCE) ordered the burning of books. For information on Fu Sheng, see Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記, *juan* 121 (Taipei: Xinlu shuju, 1964), 1054. For a study on Chinese literati’s views on Fu Sheng’s daughter and her assistance in transmitting *Shangshu*, see Wing-chung Clara Ho 劉詠聰, “Nüzi yi you gong yan: Fu Sheng nü chuanjing shuo yanjiu 女子亦有功焉: 伏生女傳經說研究,” in *Caide xiang hui: Zhongguo nüxing de zhixue yu kezi* 才德相輝: 中國女性的治學與課子 (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 2015), 203–13.

²⁴ For the story of Xie Daoyun’s poetic improvisation, see Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 137.

Yuan Mei to Xiahou Sheng, another scholar of the Western Han dynasty, who was a teacher of the imperial harem, and compares his disciples to the female poets Bao Linghui 鮑令暉 and Liu Yuan 劉媛.²⁵ Bao was a younger sister of the scholar and government official Bao Zhao 鮑照 (d. 466); Liu was a Tang-dynasty (618–907) poet whose works are included in *Complete Tang Poems* (*Quan Tangshi* 全唐詩).²⁶ These references to the past represent the colophon writers' positive views of Yuan Mei and his students.

To many authors, the figures in the painting resemble beings beyond the human world and liken the gathering location to the realm of Daoist immortals. Yuan Mei is a “divine immortal” (*shenxian* 神仙) and “exiled immortal” (*zhexian* 謫仙) and his students are “immortal beauties” (*xian'e* 仙娥), “cloud immortals” (*yunxian* 雲仙), “heavenly females” (*tiannü* 天女), “flower spirits” (*huashen* 花神), “star beauties” (*xing'e* 星娥), “moon maidens” (*yuejie* 月姐), and “jade girls” (*yünü* 玉女). The term “exiled immortal” recalls the Western Han scholar and official Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 and the great Tang poet Li Bai 李白 and is a compliment on one's literary abilities.²⁷ In the same Daoist vein, Hu Sen wrote: “Southern and northern high peaks, [toward which] people look; and see flowers growing from brushes and flying all over the Purple Orchid Palace” 南北高峰人望處, 筆花飛遍紫蘭宮. The Purple Orchid Palace is believed to be the residence of the Queen Mother of the West, a female immortal in Chinese

²⁵ When Emperor Xuan 宣帝 (r. 74–49 BCE) ascended the throne, the Empress Dowager was the regent. To prepare her to run the country, Xiahou Sheng taught her *Shangshu* 尚書, one of the Confucian classics. Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* 漢書, *juan* 75 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 3155.

²⁶ For information on Bao Linghui in English, see Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush*, 49. For Liu Yuan's poems, see *Quan tangshi* 全唐詩, *juan* 801, (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 1965.

²⁷ The Tang poet Li Bai calls Dongfang Shuo an “exiled immortal” in one of his poems. Li Bai, “Yuhu yin 玉壺吟,” reprinted in *Quan tangshi*, *juan* 166, 391. Li Bai also refers to himself as an “exiled immortal” in one poem. Li Bai, “Da Huzhou jiaye sima wen Bai shi heren 荅湖州迦葉司馬問白是何人,” reprinted in *Quan tangshi*, *juan* 178, 414.

mythology.²⁸ Xi Peilan wrote these lines: “Precious Stone Villa is located by a mirror-like lake; in the human realm, its pureness surpasses the entire Fanghu Island” 寶石山莊靠鏡湖, 人間清絕一方壺. Fanghu Island is said to be one of the five islands of immortals in the Bohai Sea.²⁹

Relating the students to beings beyond this world, as discussed in chapter 4, politely compliments their physical appearances, as it is common in Chinese literature and popular imagination to portray female spirits or immortals as beauties. Such references also explain the women’s unconventional behavior and excuse them from the norms of the Confucian patriarchy.

Some colophons describe specific components of the handscroll. For instance, Zhang Yun’ao wrote: “The painting is like *Realized Spirits* that pictures the ranks [of Daoist deities]; the preface is like the ‘Western Garden’ that records the elegant gathering [of famous Northern Song scholars]” 畫如真靈圖位業, 序如西園記雅集. Zhang’s first reference compares the main picture to *Painting of the Ranks of the Realized Spirits* 真靈位業圖 by Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536), a Daoist active in the Six Dynasties period (265–589), and compliments the figures in the *Thirteen Female Disciples* as beings beyond the human realm.³⁰ Zhang’s second reference likens Yuan Mei’s first colophon to a text, “Record to Picture of Elegant Gathering at the Western Garden” 西園雅集圖記, attributed to the Northern Song scholar Mi Fu, thus relating the 1792 poetry gathering to a classical precedent.³¹ Another note by Zhang mentions the three

²⁸ *Extensive Records of the Taiping Era* (*Taiping guangji* 太平廣記) records Han Wudi’s 漢武帝 encounters with a beautiful “jade girl” from the Purple Orchid Palace of the Queen Mother of the West. Li Fang 李昉, *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1970), 3.2a.

²⁹ The five islands are: Daiyu 岱輿, Yuanjiao 員嶠, Fanghu 方壺, Yingzhou 瀛洲, and Penglai 蓬萊. Liezi 列子, “Tangwen 湯問,” in *Liezi* 列子 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989), 35.

³⁰ This comparison is also seen in Yuan Mei’s first colophon. For Tao Hongjing, see Li Yanshou 李延壽, *Nanshi* 南史, *juan* 76 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 1897–1900.

³¹ For the “Western Garden Record,” see Mi Fu, “Xiyuan yajitu ji 西園雅集圖記,” in *Baojin yingguan ji* 寶晉英光集 (Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng shuju, 1971), 153–55.

figures in the secondary picture, following Yuan Mei's first colophon, and identifies the attendant at the end of the main painting as the wife of Yuan's nephew.³²

In verses, Yu Guojian goes into more detail about the main painting:

...

A few persons stand back in front of a stone balustrade. 幾人卻立石欄前,

A few clusters of flowers [women] hold torn 幾簇花叢手擘牋.

notes.

Literary minds cleverly unfold [on] red banana leaves. 文心巧展紅蕉葉,

Painting draft lightly sketch [on a] light-ink sky. 畫稿輕描淡墨天.

...

Of the four activities Yu describes, three are depicted in *Thirteen Female Disciples*. The picture begins with the Sun sisters approaching a stairway that leads to a terrace protected by a balustrade. A path in front of Wang Zuanzu, the one shown holding an orchid blossom, leads toward a group of three women, in which Wang Shen is about to write on a banana leaf. Behind Wang Shen, by a large garden rock and table, Liao Yunjing paints a cut flower branch.

In colophons, two women, Xi Peilan and Dai Lanying, mention their appearances in *Thirteen Female Disciples*. Xi Peilan writes about Yuan Mei, herself, and the number of students:

³² The note reads: "After the [main painting in the] scroll, [he] added another three persons. Also, there is an attendant [in the pavilion]. The latter is the wife of the Master's nephew" 卷後復增三人, 又有侍座, 後者乃先生猶子婦也。Zhang Yun'ao's notes appear in the printed text but not in the scrolls; they could have been added as further explanations for the readers of his collected writings, who might not have access to the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll when reading this text.

...

The Master, uprightly seated, wields a colored brush.	先生端坐彩毫揮，
Vying, [the disciples] hold up jade-like paper to seek instruction from the red curtain. ³³	爭捧瑤箋問絳幃。
Among them, the person who plays <i>qin</i> resembles me.	中有彈琴人似我，
Upon calculation, there are exactly thirteen <i>hui</i> [markers]. ³⁴	數來剛好十三徽。
(Paints me seated on a mossy rock playing the <i>qin</i> .) ³⁵	(畫余坐苔石畔撫琴。)

...

In the main painting, Xi Peilan is shown playing the *qin* near a few trees and garden rocks. Dai Lanying's colophon mentions: "Sir, because 'little' Yuan [Yuan Mei's nephew] had compassion for me; [my image] was painted to fill a blank area" 公因小阮憐鄙人，丹青補在空虛處。³⁶

Again, in the main painting, Dai is shown in the pavilion with Yuan Mei.

Zeng Ao's colophon consists of several seven-character quatrains, and all of them directly or indirectly touch upon Yuan Mei's support for talented women. The first poem

³³ The "red curtain" (*jiangzhang* 絳幃) is an abbreviation of "red-gauze curtain" (*jiangshazhang* 絳紗幃) and stands for the teacher. The reference comes from the biography of the Eastern Han scholar Ma Rong 馬融, who hung a red-gauze curtain when instructing students. Fan Ye 范曄, "Ma Rong liezhuan di wushi shang 馬融列傳第五十上," in *Houhanshu* 後漢書, *juan* 90, *shang* 上 (Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 12a.

³⁴ *Hui* 徽 is the pitch marker on the *qin* instrument. In this poem, it refers to each depicted disciple.

³⁵ Xi Peilan's notes appear in her collected writings but not in her painting colophon. Xi Peilan, "Suiyuan xiansheng mingti shisan nüdizi hulou qingye tu 隨園先生命題十三女弟子湖樓請業圖," in *Changzhenge ji* 長真閣集 (1891), 4.2ab.

³⁶ In addition to the colophon attached to the scroll, Yuan Mei also included Dai Lanying's text in *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan*, *juan* 5, 137.

compliments his family for nurturing talented women, as Zeng explains in two notes: “Sir’s three sisters all have collected writings circulated” 先生三妹皆有集行世; “Sir’s daughter-in-law Lady Tiaoxi is capable in poetry” 先生子婦苕溪女士能詩. The second poem likens Yuan Mei to the great Tang poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), refers to Yuan’s students as beauties by calling them “moth eyebrows” (*mei* 蛾眉), and mentions his promotion of literary compositions by young women. The third poem compares Yuan Mei and his disciples to Vimalakīrti and “heavenly females” (*tianü* 天女), playing on the similarities between the concept of enlightenment in poetry and in Chan Buddhism. The fourth poem praises Yuan Mei as a great educator because his female students are superior to the beauties of the harem of the Wu kingdom trained by the famous Eastern Zhou military strategist Sunzi 孫子.³⁷ These poems remind the viewer of the role of male support in the artistic and literary lives of female talents: the women often became known through their relationships with famous male scholars and were remembered as these men’s relatives, lovers, or students.

5.2 Multiple Versions of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* Scroll

As noted earlier, I know of four handscrolls depicting the 1792 poetry gathering of Yuan Mei and his female disciples, those in the Suzhou Museum, Shanghai Museum, and Zhejiang Provincial Museum and one was sold through the Christie’s auction house in 2010. These four scrolls feature the same pictures and colophons by Yuan Mei and his contemporaries, with slight differences in the positions of a few texts. In the next section, I review Qing-period texts that

³⁷ The anecdote of Sunzi being challenged by the Wu king Helu 闔廬 to have the beauties in the Wu palace trained according to his military theories is recorded in Sima Qian 司馬遷, “Sunzi Wu Qi liezhuan diwu 孫子吳起列傳第五,” in *Shiji* 史記, *juan* 65 (Taipei: Xinlu shuju, 1964), 726.

document the existence of various versions of *Thirteen Female Disciples* and pictures of Yuan Mei's female students. Then I briefly discuss the modern scholarship of Luo Yimin, who questions the authenticity of a version published in 1929, i.e. the Suzhou Museum scroll, and considers it a completely fabricated "counterfeit" (*weizuo* 偽作).³⁸ I introduce and analyze a few of his arguments because they highlight the complexity of authenticating the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll and are related to my study of the scroll in other chapters of this dissertation. Concluding the chapter is my argument that the pictures and the colophons in these four scrolls are not fabrications but are identical to those in an original scroll ordered by Yuan Mei. Multiple copies based on the authentic scroll could have been requested by Yuan, his friends, or others. They could have been made to express admiration for the individuals in the picture and to exploit public fascination with the painting theme. Alternately, copies could have been intended as counterfeits of the original made for personal gain because of the work's connection to the famous poet Yuan Mei gave it a high value. In the case of this handscroll, and others like it, the issue is not the hand of particular masters but rather how the multiples relate to one another and the original.

5.2.1 Pictures of Yuan Mei's Female Disciples Recorded in Qing Texts

Qing-period texts mention multiple versions and copies of pictures of Yuan Mei's female students, but the information provided is insufficient to connect them to either extant works or

³⁸ Luo Yimin discussed the scroll in his 2007 biography of Yuan Mei, chapter 14, "The Authenticity of the Shenzhou Version of the *Thirteen Female Disciples Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion*" 十三女弟子湖樓請業圖神州版的真偽. Luo Yimin, *Zi cai zi: Yuan Mei zhuan* 子才子: 袁枚傳 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 2007), 211–29. Luo calls the copy that he studies the "Shenzhou version" since it was published by Shenzhou guoguang she 神州國光社 in 1929. Luo Yimin, *Zi cai zi: Yuan Mei zhuan*, 213. Judging from the reproductions in Luo's book and the colophons it contains, the "Shenzhou version" is likely the Suzhou Museum version. For these reproductions, see Luo Yimin, *Zi cai zi*, 223–27.

each other. Yuan Mei's grandson Yuan Zuzhi 袁祖志 (1827–98) distinguishes two “authentic traces” (*zhenji* 真跡) in his family's collection from counterfeits in circulation:

Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion counts two handscrolls. One was obtained by Gao Changshen (art name: Songyu), a surveillance commissioner from Mizhi.³⁹ The other was purchased by Mister Wu Kunxiu (art name: Zhuzhuan), a vice censor-in-chief of Anhui, after the turmoil. Each paid the price of a thousand *yuan* of foreign silver coins.⁴⁰ These are both authentic traces. Those circulating elsewhere are all counterfeit copies.

湖樓請業圖計兩卷，一為米脂高篙漁觀察長紳所得，一為安徽中丞吳竹庄先生坤修購於亂後，價費洋銀千元，此皆真跡，他處所傳悉贗本也。⁴¹

The text contains no further information—such as the painting composition, components of the handscrolls, and the names of the painters and colophon writers—but is valuable for conveying the high value of the scrolls when they were purchased from the Yuan family collection and the circulation of counterfeits several decades following Yuan Mei's death.⁴²

³⁹ For information on Gao Changshen, see “Jiangsu Changzhen tonghai bingbei dao Gao Changshen mu 江蘇常鎮通海兵備道高長紳墓,” in Gao Zhaochu 高照初 and Yan Jianzhang 嚴建章, *Mizhixian zhi* 米脂縣志 (1944), 2.46b–2.47a.

⁴⁰ For information on Wu Kunxiu, see Zeng Zuozhou 曾作舟, *Nanchangfu zhi* 南昌府志 (1873), 51.27b–51.28a. According to Richard von Glahn, foreign silver coins became the monetary standard of China at this time, and the *yuan* was the standard counting unit. Richard von Glahn, “Foreign Silver Coins in the Market Culture of Nineteenth-Century China,” *International Journal of Asian Studies* 4.1 (2007): 51.

⁴¹ Yuan Zuzhi, *Suiyuan suoji* 隨園瑣記, reprinted in *Congshu jicheng sanbian* 叢書集成三編, vol. 76 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1997), 113.

⁴² According to a Qing text: “Foreign coin initially circulated in coastal areas; its value was equivalent to 600-plus standard copper coins per silver coin.” Translation in Von Glahn, “Foreign Silver Coins,” 63.

A few of the colophons in the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll also indicate the existence of more than one painting composition of Yuan Mei's female students. According to Liu Xi: "The Master, at this time, again made a picture of [his] female disciples" 先生於此間又作女弟子圖. Xi Peilan wrote: "Just like the 'jade tablet in thirteen lines,' various people's copies also have new additions" 恰比十三行玉版, 誰家副本又新添.⁴³ Following these two poetic lines, Xi explained: "After the picture made, [the Master] again received thirteen [female students] and thus made another picture" 作圖後又得十三因別為一圖. Yuan Shufang mentioned: "*Seeking Instruction* was again made with the later thirteen [pupils]; attending Sir allowed me to be placed among them" 請業重圖後十三, 侍公容我蝨其間. Since Yuan Shufang does not appear in either picture in the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll, she likely refers to another composition, showing a different set of women. A female writer surnamed He wrote on the Zhejiang Provincial Museum version:

I, as a child, heard my late father mentioning that Master Suiyuan has [a painting of] *Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion*. The thirteen persons in it are all famous beauties. In the past I longed for a look at it but was unable to obtain it. After my coming of age, I studied poetry with Master Yunbo whose secondary wife Guan Xiangyu owned a duplicate that captures the likenesses [of the original], and more than ten years had passed since then.⁴⁴ At Bingxia Immortal

⁴³ For an alternative translation and interpretation of Xi Peilan's poetic lines, see Riegel, "Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1798) and a Different 'Elegant Gathering,'" 107–8.

⁴⁴ Chen Wenshu 陳文述 (1771–1843; art name: Yunbo 雲伯) and Guan Yun 管筠 (art name: Xiangyu 湘玉). Shi Shuyi 施淑儀, *Qingdai guige shiren zhenglue* 清代閨閣詩人徵略, *juan 7*, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong Qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian* 三十三種清代人物傳記資料彙編, vol. 41 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 106–07.

Hall of the Zhang family of Qinchuan, I was able to view respectfully the genuine version and was extremely delighted...

余幼時聞先君言隨園先生有湖樓請業圖，中十三人皆名媛也，也嘗思一見而未得。後髫年從雲伯先生學詩，其攝夫人管湘玉藏有副本，得其神似，而已有十餘年。於琴川張氏之冰霞仙館中得觀真本，歡喜無量...⁴⁵

According to Yuan's female disciple Lu Yuansu 盧元素: "In the *bingchen* year [1796], on the twelfth day of the third moon, Suiyuan, my teacher, came to call on my husband, Qian Dong, painted *Supplement to Picture of Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion*, and had Yuansu added [in this picture]" 丙辰三月十二日，隨園夫子過訪錢郎，畫續湖樓請業圖，以元素附焉。⁴⁶ The word "supplement" suggests that prior to Yuan Mei's visit, a composition called *Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion* was already in existence. Yet, like the previous texts, this one provides no other information about the work.

Several other Qing-period writers also recorded the existence of different versions of *Thirteen Female Disciples*. The late-Qing scholar Kuang Zhouyi 况周頤 (1859–1926) reported:

Pictures of Suiyuan's female disciples seeking instruction at the lake pavilion, one album and one handscroll. The album paints thirteen female students' portraits, each person on one leaf; it is collected in the household of Li Chuanyuan (art name: Junong), from Kunshan. I have yet to see it. The handscroll has a long

⁴⁵ For a transcription of He's colophon, see Xie Jun, *Chuanshen adu*, 160–61.

⁴⁶ Yuan Mei included Lu Yuansu's text in his *Xu tongren ji, guixiu lei*, 247.

picture with a landscape background. It is collected in the Juxue Studio of the Liu family from Guichi.

隨園女弟子湖樓請業圖冊一卷一，冊繪十三女弟子小象人各一葉，藏崑山李菊農傳元家，余未之見，卷則長幀布景者也，藏貴池劉氏聚學軒。⁴⁷

Kuang Zhouyi devoted the rest of his text to the handscroll. He identified Wang Wenzhi as the calligrapher for the title panel and You Zhao 尤詔 and Wang Gong 汪恭 as the painters. He also recorded the names of the colophon writers and transcribed the texts by Yuan Mei, Qinglin, Wang Wenzhi, Xi Peilan, and Yuan Shufang. Kuang Zhouyi's account corresponds to the components of the Suzhou Museum version, suggesting that it is likely the one he saw.

As for versions known through Qing texts, Kuang Zhouyi also wrote about a “freehand copy” (*linben* 臨本): “Yunzizaikan has a ‘freehand copy’ of picture of *Seeking Instruction*; all is portrayed according to the original picture... [It] has been in circulation for a long time and can almost be confused for the original” 請業圖雲自在龕有臨本，悉依原圖寫真... 傳世久遠，殆能亂真矣。⁴⁸ Mentioning an art name of Yuan Mei, the Qing female writer Zhao Fen 趙綦 indicates the existence of another copy: “Inscribing Lady Gu Renqiu's traced copy of Sir Yuan Zicai's *Thirteen Female Disciples Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion*” 題袁子才先生十三女弟子

⁴⁷ Kuang Zhouyi, *Ruankan biji wuzhong* 阮龕筆記五種, reprinted in *Congshu jicheng xubian* 叢書集成續編, vol. 24 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chubanshe, 1989), 740.

⁴⁸ Kuang Zhouyi, *Ruankan biji wuzhong*, 742. Yunzizaikan possibly refers to the late Qing scholar Miao Quansun 繆荃孫 (1844–1919), for one of his collected writings is titled *Casual Writings of Yunzizaikan*. Miao Quansun, *Yunzizaikan suibi* 雲自在龕隨筆 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1958).

湖樓請業圖顧紉秋夫人摹本。⁴⁹ One disciple, Sun Yunfeng, wrote an inscription for a painting, titled *Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion*, in the collection of Sun Fuzhi 孫輔之。⁵⁰ And there is a record of a painting by Feng Zhiyan 馮芝岩, a Qing-dynasty painter, titled *Tracing Suiyuan Old Man's Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion* 摹隨園老人湖樓請業圖, which the National Museum of China possesses.⁵¹

5.2.2 The Question of Authenticity

In the mid-1980s, as a part of an ambitious project to examine all of the paintings in the public institutions in the People's Republic of China, a team of eight experts—including the renowned connoisseurs Xu Bangda 徐邦達, Fu Xinian 傅熹年, and Qi Gong 啓功—inspected the Shanghai Museum version of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll (in 1985) and the Suzhou Museum version (in 1986) and proclaimed both to be “authentic traces.”⁵² However, Luo Yimin, a professor at the School of Cultural Communication at Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, in his 2007 biography of Yuan Mei, argued that a version published by Shenzhou guoguang she 神州國光社 in 1929—which was apparently the Suzhou Museum scroll—was a completely fabricated counterfeit.⁵³

⁴⁹ Zhao Feng, “Ti Yuan Zicai xiansheng shisan nüdizi hulou qingye tu Gu Renqiu furen moben,” in *Lüyüexuan shiyu* 瀟月軒詩餘, in Xu Naichang 徐乃昌, *Xiaotanluan shi huike guixiu ci* 小檀樂室彙刻閩秀詞 (1896), 7a. Lady Gu Renqiu is possibly Gu Hui 顧蕙 (1792–1842; art name: Renqiu), a poet and painter. Xu Naichang, *Xiaotanluan shi huike guixiu ci*, 13.18b.

⁵⁰ Yuan Mei included Sun Yunfeng's text, “Ti hulou qingye tu wei Sun Fuzhi zuo 題湖樓請業圖為孫輔之作,” in *Xu tongren ji, guixiu lei*, 240.

⁵¹ The record of Feng's copy is in *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu* 中國古代書畫圖目, vol. 1 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1986), 82.

⁵² Lao Jixiong 勞繼雄, *Zhongguo gudai shuhua jianding shilu* 中國古代書畫鑑定實錄 (Shanghai: Dongfang chubanshe, 2011), 1504 and 1968.

⁵³ Luo Yimin argues that this scroll was created for monetary gain; therefore, I adopt Jason Kuo's translation of the *wei* character and translate the word, *weizuo* 偽作, as “counterfeit.” Jason Kuo, “Reflections on Connoisseurship,” in *Perspectives on Connoisseurship of Chinese Painting* (Washington, DC: New Academia, 2008), 18.

Luo Yimin finds the scroll unconvincing on a number of grounds, including the absence of the master's calligraphy.⁵⁴ This argument depends on the assumption that Yuan Mei wrote all of his colophons himself, ignoring the fact that, like many famous scholars, he relied at times on “substitute brushes” (*daibi* 代筆) or ghostwriters to meet the demand for his work; in one text, Yuan Mei says: “I, since young, do not practice calligraphy. Whenever literary works [have to be made], [I] request others to write on my behalf. This is known throughout the country” 余幼不習書, 每有著作倩人代作, 海內所知也.⁵⁵ Therefore, even if Yuan Mei did not personally compose or write the colophons for the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll, the texts and calligraphy are not fakes as long as he approved them.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ My summary of Luo Yimin's arguments in this chapter are all drawn from his *Zi cai zi: Yuan Mei zhuan*, 211–29. Luo argues that since Yuan was already at a very advanced age when the scroll was made, his weak eyesight and unsteady hand should have affected his calligraphy; since the first colophon shows no apparent trace of such limitations, it must be a forgery.

⁵⁵ Yuan Mei, *Xiaocangshan fang shiji*, *juan* 34, 844. One letter from Yuan Mei to his female student Luo Qilan records his employment of ghostwriters:

[Regarding your] request to inscribe an orchid painting to be sent to the Tax-grains Transportation Official, [I] first commanded Zhushi [Chen Ji 陳基] and Atong [Yuan Tong 袁通] to compose on my behalf but was unsatisfied [with their works]. To comply, this old man leaned over a pillow and did it. However, this also wearied me to have missed sleep for twenty *xuyu*.

屬題寄轉運之畫蘭, 初命竹士, 阿通代作, 都不愜意, 依舊老人伏枕為之, 然亦累我少睡二十須臾矣。

Luo Qilan included Yuan Mei's letter in *Tingqiuxuan zengyan* 聽秋軒贈言, *fu laishu* 付來書, reprinted in *Jiangnan nüxing bieji* 江南女性別集, *erbian shangce* 二編上冊, ed. Hu Xiaoming 胡曉明 and Peng Guozhong 彭國忠 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2010), 790.

⁵⁶ Other extant writings by Yuan Mei also suggest his employment of substitute calligraphers, as variations can be seen in the character type and in the shape of the same stroke. For example, the brush strokes composing the character *yuan* 袁, for his surname, are inconsistent in his letters to Fa Shishan 法式善 (1752–1813) and Li Xianglin 李香林. The *yuan* character used in the Fa Shishan letter is today considered the standard character (*zhenzi* 正字): it contains a *kou* 口 character in the center and has in total ten strokes. The one in the Li Xianglin letter would be called a character variant (*yitizi* 異體字): it contains only eight strokes and does not have the *kou* character in the center. Regarding shapes of individual strokes: in the Fa Shishan letter, the eighth stroke is written by moving the brush down vertically and then turning and lifting it to form a right hook; in the Li Xianglin letter, the right hook is missing. The *yuan* character in the Fa Shishan letter ends with a *na* 捺 stroke, created by dragging the brush toward the lower right and gradually lifting it to make a pointed end. Yet, in the Li Xianglin letter, the stroke finishes with a round end formed by circling the brush tip. These variations suggest that the two letters were written by different hands. The letter to Fa Shishan is in *Suiyuan shouhan* 隨園手翰, reprinted in *Guojia tushuguan cang chaogaoben Qianjia mingren bieji congkan* 國家圖書館藏鈔稿本乾嘉名人別集叢刊, vol. 4 (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan

The content of the main painting also leads to Luo's suspicion. He holds that the depicted event is the 1790 meeting rather than the 1792 one, based on Yuan Mei's writing that records thirteen students at the 1790 meeting.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, earlier chapters of this dissertation have shown that the main painting depicts the 1792 gathering. In additions, Luo believes the representation of the poetry gathering in the authentic work should match the accounts of the 1790 event by depicting a rainy scene, with the human figures in a multistory building; the picture should also include the famous views in the West Lake area.⁵⁸ The Suzhou scroll does not match these texts but rather depicts a single-story pavilion and outdoor activities on a clear day without the famous scenic views around the West Lake area. As discussed in chapter 3, paintings of this type are not necessarily literal records of events.⁵⁹ Therefore, the accurate representation of an event is not a requirement for the authenticity of a document, especially if, as has been argued, the painters cast the event according to established pictorial traditions.

chubanshe, 2010), 564–66. The letter to Li Xianglin is in *Yuan Jianzhai shouzha* 袁簡齋手劄, reprinted in *Guojia tushuguan cang chaogaoben Qianjia mingren bieji congkan*, vol. 4, 600–02.

⁵⁷ Yuan Mei, “Gengxu chunmu yu xihu baoshi shanzhuang, linxing fushi jishi 庚戌春暮寓西湖孫氏寶石山莊，臨行賦詩紀事,” in *Xiaocangshan fang shiji*, *juan* 32, 793.

⁵⁸ A text by Sun Yunfeng 孫雲鳳, “Preface to Picture of Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion,” contains a line, “Ascending the pavilion and viewing the scenery” 登斯樓覽斯景, from which Luo concludes that Sun Jiale's lake pavilion was a multistory building and that the students should be shown on the upper level of the structure. As for the rainy scene, the same writing states: “At that time, the wind and rain can be heard” 其時風雨有聲; “on the balustrade, falling, is the rain of the peach blossoms” 檻落桃花之雨. “Preface to Sending Off [Yuan Mei] at the Lake Pavilion,” another text by Sun, refers to “solitary mountain” (*gushan* 孤山), “peak of sunset glow” (*xizhao zhi feng* 夕照之峰), and “bright lake” (*minghu* 明湖), which Luo takes to be famous views of the West Lake area, and thus the genuine painting would have Mount Nanping 南屏山, Tower of Lightning Peak 雷峰塔, and West Lake in its composition. Sun Yunfeng's texts are in *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan*, *juan* 1, 28–30.

⁵⁹ For instance, the Ming painting, *Gathering of Ten Officials [Who Received the Presented-Scholar Degree] in the Jiashen Year*, represents a historical event with imaginary content. According to one participant, Li Dongyang 李東陽 (1447–1516), although Jiao Fang 焦芳 (1435–1517) is depicted in the painting, he was on a diplomatic trip and did not attend the meeting. Li Dongyang, “Jiashen shitongnian shixu 甲申十同年詩序,” in *Huailutang wen hou gao* 懷麓堂文後稿, *juan* 3, reprinted in *Huailutang gao* 懷麓堂稿, vol. 5 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1975), 2398. Another example is the legendary Northern Song “Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden” whose historicity is questionable. For a study of this gathering, see Ellen Johnston Laing, “Real or Ideal: The Problem of the ‘Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden’ in Chinese Historical and Art Historical Records,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88.3 (Jul.–Sept., 1968): 419–35.

Luo relies on his interpretation of the writings by Lu Yuansu and Dai Lanying and argues that they should appear in the smaller painting. As mentioned earlier, Lu recorded her addition to *Supplement to Picture of Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion*, and Dai Lanying's colophon mentions the addition of her image in a "blank area." To Luo, the *Supplement* and the blank area both refer to the smaller painting in the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll. From my perspective, the existence of multiple versions of pictures of Yuan Mei's students explains the absence of Lu, as she could have been shown in another work, and Dai's text can mean that she was added to the side of Yuan Mei in the pavilion in the larger painting.

According to Luo Yimin, the authentic scroll is a work that Yuan Mei ordered and personally inscribed and should be one of the two handscrolls in Yuan Zuzhi's text, mentioned earlier. The main painting should represent the 1790 gathering literally, following the printed texts about this event, and the scroll should contain the colophons and seals of every collector. In addition, none of the inscriptions should appear spurious. Luo does not take into consideration Yuan Mei's attitude toward ghostwriting and bases his opinions upon his presumptions and interpretations of Qing-period texts. Moreover, he is unaware of the pictorial traditions of "elegant-gathering pictures" and the existence of multiples of *Thirteen Female Disciples* and other pictures of Yuan Mei's students. Therefore, his arguments and approaches are questionable, and I find his assertion that the scroll is a complete fabrication to be untenable.

My study of the colophons leads to my argument that it is difficult to imagine the fabrication of a work as complex and multifaceted as the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll. One challenge comes from the discrepancy between the large amount of time one would need to collect all the painting inscriptions (if one was to work from printed publications) and the short period of time in which the work could have been created. For example, several of the texts were

published over a few decades. Those by Dai Lanying and Xi Peilan are in *Selected Poems from the Female Disciples of the Harmony Garden*, published after 1796.⁶⁰ Liang Tongshu's text is in *Posthumous Collection of Pinluo Hut (Pinluoan yiji 頻羅庵遺集)*, printed in 1817.⁶¹ Yuan Shufang's colophon can be found in the poetry anthology of Wu Qiongqian, another colophon writer, whose publication was not available until 1832.⁶² The date of the earliest inscription left by later viewers was the summer of 1833, by Zhou Rulin on the Christie's version. Unless the writing by Zhou was fabricated or Yuan's text acquired another way, the scroll would have had to be created in less than two years.

Identification of members of Yuan Mei's diverse, extensive circle would have posed another challenge to someone wishing to fabricate the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll. This scholarly community, as constructed by the many names in the handscroll, reflects Yuan's social circle later in his life. For example, within the year 1795, he met in person with several colophon writers, including Wang Wenzhi, Zeng Ao, Yu Aotu, and Wu Weiguang.⁶³ In 1796, he interacted with Wu Qiongqian, Cheng Ce, Qinglin, Dai Lanying, and Gui Maoyi through personal visits and written communication.⁶⁴ For a forger, to create such a convincing coterie of male and

⁶⁰ Harvard-Yenching Library has a copy of this publication, which was published during the Daoguang 道光 years (1796–1850).

⁶¹ Liang Tongshu, "Ti Suiyuan xiansheng nüdizi qingyetu juan," 427. This reprint is based on the version, published in the twenty-second year of the Jiaqing reign (1817), in the collection of the library of Shanghai cishu chubanshe 上海辭書出版社.

⁶² For Yuan Shufang's colophon, see Wu Qiongqian, *Xieyunlou shiji 寫韻樓詩集* (1832), 3.3a–3.4a.

⁶³ Yuan Mei watched a play with Wang Wenzhi and Zeng Ao. Wang Wenzhi, *Menglou shiji 夢樓詩集*, juan 24, reprinted in *Qingdai shiwenji huibian*, vol. 370 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010), 837. Later, upon a visit to Taicang 太倉, he called on Yu Aotu. Zheng Xing, *Yuan Mei nianpu xinbian*, 607. Yuan Mei's travels in 1795 continued, and in Suzhou he met with Wu Weiguang at a party. Wu Weiguang, in his text celebrating the eighty Chinese years of Yuan Mei, mentioned Yuan's visit. Yuan Mei included Wu's text in *Suiyuan bashi shouyan 隨園八十壽言*, juan 6, reprinted in *Yuan Mei quanji 袁枚全集*, vol. 6, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 112.

⁶⁴ In the spring of 1796, he visited Wu Qiongqian and had her write for the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll. Yuan Mei's visit is recorded in a writing by Wu's husband Xu Dayuan 徐達源 in Wu's collected writings. Xu Dayuan, "Xingzhuang 行狀," in Wu Qiongqian, *Xieyunlou shiji*, 1b. Yuan Mei also recorded the visit; see Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shi hua bu yi*, 804–05. In the same year, he also met with Cheng Ce. Yuan Mei, *Xiaocangshan fang shiji*, juan 36,

female intellectuals would have meant a tremendous amount of work, going through many writings by not only Yuan Mei but also his contemporaries, because the records of some interactions among these individuals can only be found in the latter's publications.

Among the Shanghai, Suzhou, Zhejiang, and Christie's versions, and perhaps some other scrolls yet to be discovered, only one is authentic in the sense that it was ordered by Yuan Mei, and within this scroll the two pictures were made by You Zhao, Wang Gong, and Mister Cui, the three painters recorded in Yuan's two inscriptions. The colophons by Yuan Mei's contemporaries were created at his request and gathered by him. The other scrolls, from the title panel by Wang Wenzhi to the colophon by Qian Daxin, the last inscription by Yuan's peers, were copies based on the original, and therefore the pictures and colophons in these works are identical.

The earliest dated colophon left by later Qing scholars on each version of *Thirteen Female Disciples* suggests their existence in the first half of the nineteenth century. Thus, they are not twentieth-century counterfeits.⁶⁵ Nor were these scrolls made as multiples for every gathering participant, such as the Ming works mentioned in chapter 3, *Elegant Gathering in the Apricot Garden* and *Gathering for Birthday Celebration in the Bamboo Garden*. As studied in chapter 2, not all of the women in the picture attended the meeting, and the male participants

893. As for other forms of interactions, Yuan Mei wrote letters to Qinglin and inscribed paintings of or owned by Dai Lanying and Gui Maoyi, and these writings can be dated to 1795 or 1796. One letter is in Yuan Mei, "Yu Qing Shuzhai shangshu 與慶樹齋尚書," in *Xiaocangshan fang chidu*, juan 9, 195. In this letter, Yuan Mei recorded the Jiaqing emperor's banquet for the elders in 1796, and therefore the letter was composed after that event. For Dai Lanying, see Yuan Mei, "Ti zhifu Dai Lanying qiudeng kezi tu 題侄婦戴蘭英秋燈課子圖," in *Xiaocangshan fang shiji*, juan 36, 899. For Gui Maoyi, see Yuan Mei, "Ti Gui Peishan nüshi langao miju tu 題歸佩珊女士蘭皋覓句圖," in *Xiaocangshan fang shiji*, juan 36, 906.

⁶⁵ Shen Wenyuan inscribed the Suzhou version, mentioning his purchase of the scroll in the spring of the *bingshen* 丙申 year (1836). Zhou Rulin wrote in the Christie's version, recording his viewing of the work in the summer of the *guisi* 癸巳 year (1833).

were excluded from the picture. Therefore, it was unnecessary to have the copies serve as records of participation and tokens of membership in the elite society depicted in the painting.

Admiration for the figures in the picture was certainly among the reasons for the creation of copies. In the following passage from his *Poetry Talks of Harmony Garden* (*Suiyuan shihua* 隨園詩話) Yuan Mei reports a copy made by an admiring woman:

I had *Elegant Gathering in the Harmony Garden* painted; thirty years have passed and [the work] has been filled with inscriptions by celebrities of the day, only lacking [compositions by] the talents from the inner chamber.⁶⁶ Admiring Lady Yixiang's talents and knowing that [she] is in Wumen [Suzhou], [I] wrote a letter asking for an inscription but felt presumptuous [for my action]. Not even five days after [the letter] was sent, the lady also [sent] a letter requesting [that I] inscribe her portrait, *Picking Auspicious Grasses*. [Though] a thousand *li* away, without a plan, we agreed; it was marvelous. I traced *Picking Auspicious Grasses* [to make] a secondary copy. When [I] arrived at Suzhou and told this to the lady, she also showed me a freehand copy of *Elegant Gathering in the Harmony Garden*. We both burst into laughter...

余畫隨園雅集圖，三十年來，當代名流題者滿矣，惟少閨秀一門。慕漪香夫人之才，知在吳門，修札索題，自覺冒昧。乃寄未五日，而夫人亦書來，命題採芝小照

⁶⁶ According to Yuan Mei's grandson Yuan Zuzhi, the picture was created by a painter named Wu Shengzeng 吳省曾. Yuan Zuzhi, *Suiyuan suoji*, 112.

. 千里外，不謀而合，業已奇矣。余臨采芝圖副本，到蘇州，告知夫人，而夫人亦將雅集圖臨本見示，彼此大笑...⁶⁷

Personal gain was likely another reason for the existence of copies, as many people sought works by Yuan Mei to benefit from association with his fame.⁶⁸ As indicated in Yuan Zuzhi's text, the two handscrolls of *Seeking Instruction at the Lake Pavilion* in the collection of the Yuan family sold for a great amount of money.⁶⁹ Yuan Mei's contemporaries were willing to pay a high price for his writings. The late Qing scholar Jiang Dunfu 蔣敦復 tells of a salt merchant surnamed An 安 who happily spent two thousand gold units in exchange for a painting inscription of only twenty-two words by Yuan Mei.⁷⁰ Jiang also wrote about a painting by the female painter Wu Zhengsu 吳政肅, suspecting that the high price paid by a salt merchant for this work was primarily due to its containing an inscription by Yuan Mei.⁷¹ Therefore, copies of *Thirteen Female Disciples* could have been made to meet this type of demand.

Excluding the Zhejiang Provincial Museum version, it is hard to determine which of the other three scrolls is the authentic original. The Zhejiang version is identified by an inscription as a traced copy; the calligraphic styles, ink tones, and sizes of the characters of this scroll's colophons are very similar, suggesting that these texts were copied by the same hand and at the

⁶⁷ Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua*, juan 2, 43

⁶⁸ Yuan Mei's fame was international; envoys from Korea read Yuan Mei's collected writings during their diplomatic mission and spent a substantial sum to purchase several tens of the publications to be given to their peers. Yuan Mei's literary capabilities were so greatly admired that, in the next year, the envoys acquired more volumes. Jiang Dunfu, "Gaoli shichen gou Suiyuan ji 高麗使臣購隨園集," in *Suiyuan yishi* 隨園軼事, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 8 ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 50–1. Jiang was a friend of Yuan Zude 袁祖德, a grandson of Yuan Mei; therefore, his account was likely derived from his association with the Yuan family. Jiang Dunfu, *Suiyuan yishi*, 1.

⁶⁹ Yuan Zuzhi, *Suiyuan suoji*, 113.

⁷⁰ Jiang Dunfu, "Zhong runbi 重潤筆," in *Suiyuan yishi*, 88.

⁷¹ Jiang Dunfu, "Tihua shi 題畫詩," in *Suiyuan yishi*, 89.

same time. The difficulty in authenticating the other three versions lies in the inability to apply the method of comparative stylistic analysis to the paintings and calligraphy. As noted in chapter 1, You Zhao and Wang Gong were minor painters with few surviving works, and the painter Cui is not identified beyond his surname; due to the lack of information about their oeuvres, art historians are uncertain about their artistic styles. Regarding the colophons, many of the authors were not known as calligraphers and thus left few works that have been studied and identified. As for the more famous scholars, including Yuan Mei, these scrolls might not carry their own handwriting, as the employment of ghostwriters was not uncommon for them to meet the demand for their works.

Another challenge in determining the original among the three is the lack of great variation among them; they differ only in minor details, such as the colors of the figures' clothing and the positions of a few colophons. All of the components of these scrolls follow the order described in chapter 1: Wang Wenzhi's title panel, the main painting of the 1792 poetry gathering, Yuan Mei's first colophon, the secondary painting of three women, Yuan's second colophon, and the rest of the inscriptions by Yuan's contemporaries and later viewers. For the colophon portions, the creators strove to duplicate not only each individual's handwriting style and character size but also the positions of most of the texts and the shapes of the papers on which they were written. Many colophons are inscribed directly adjacent to each other and fill the scroll from top to bottom. One exception is Hu Sen's colophon, written below Wang Chang's, which occupies only a third of the paper height. Another is the long inscription by Zhang Yun'ao, placed below the ones by Wu Weiguang and Qinglin, which also occupy a third of the paper height. Wang Mingsheng's text is written above Kang Kai's, and Li Tingjing's is above Dong Xun's. Those by An Sheng'e and Yu Ao'tu are positioned side by side, below that

by Cheng Ce. While An Sheng'e and Yu Ao'tu each wrote on smaller, square pieces of paper, Yuan Shufang, Xi Peilan, Yan Ruizhu, Wang Huifang, Wu Qiongxian, and Dai Lanying all inscribed on separate sheets of rectangular paper.

Among the Shanghai, Suzhou, and Christie's versions, the Suzhou scroll is most remote from the original since the women in the main painting appear more as idealized beauties and less as self-sufficient writers and painters. The other two scrolls depict the students as individuals in various stages in their lives; some look older than others, with more pronounced facial lines. In the Suzhou version, the women look uniformly young, with smooth faces, and the similar physical features of several make them appear to be the same person in various costumes. In addition, the more obvious presence of earrings and makeup, indicated by the contrast between pale faces and red lips, recall the conventional concepts and images of female beauty, discussed in chapter 4.

The depiction of the flow of the stream to the right of the pavilion in the main painting is the most unnatural in the Suzhou scroll. In all of the versions, the water passes from a lake in the distance through a channel between two bits of land, toward a small bridge in the foreground. Moving downward left to right, the current in the narrow channel is turbulent. Exiting the channel, the stream continues to flow downward, as indicated in the Shanghai and Christie's versions by the series of curvy lines at the channel mouth and around the bridge pier. In the Suzhou scroll, however, the flow of the water appears to slow abruptly, suggested by the short, discontinuous curvy lines at the mouth of the channel. Around the bridge in the Suzhou scroll, the current appears to turn a horizontal direction though there is no outlet for the water on either bank.

Comparing the Shanghai and Christie's scrolls, the garden elements, including trees and rocks, are more carefully drawn in the former. One example is the tree with blue leaves to the left of the pavilion. In the Shanghai version, the gnarled tree trunk is rendered by many straight and curvy strokes, usually paralleling one another and in various thickness and ink tones, which create the impression of a rugged texture and knobby protuberances. Added ink dots also suggest moss on the bark. In the Christie's version, the long texture strokes curve irregularly and cross one another instead of following the outer contour of the tree, indicating the brush was not handled with adequate control. Because some marks that indicate the knobs are muddled, and thick, short strokes are almost indistinguishable from the dots used to indicate mosses, the tree bark appears less naturalistic. For the rock behind Jiang Xinbao, in the Shanghai scroll, a thick, dark ink stroke is only used for the contour and cavity of the portion of the rock to the left of the bamboo branches. The surface texture is conveyed by gray strokes that parallel the shape of the rock. In the Christie's version, the dark ink outline is applied more uniformly, including where the rock meets the ground and the parts behind the bamboo. This makes the rock appear as if it is not fully on the ground, and it reduces the implied distance between the rock and the bamboo plant. Also decreased is the sense of the rock's volume because the surface texture is created by gray washes and irregular strokes that cross one another rather than following the shape of the rock. These details suggest that the painter of the Christie's version imitated the contour of the garden features and filled in texture strokes without considering various brush techniques that together would make these background elements appear more naturalistic.

Conclusion

As demonstrated by its many colophons, the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll documents Yuan Mei's efforts in promoting his students to his contemporaries and his diverse social circle that consisted of both male and female intellectuals. The colophon authors engaged with each other and the main painting through their inscriptions, which reveal a positive perception toward talented women and the interactions between Yuan Mei and his students. These texts are instrumental in countering an argument that the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll is an inauthentic fabrication. Even though some of the colophons were made available through printed publications, gathering them for the purpose of creating a made-up scroll would have spanned many years. Of the four *Thirteen Female Disciples* scrolls I have found, I remain uncertain if one is the original scroll that Yuan Mei ordered. The conventional method of examining artistic styles to determine authenticity is difficult to apply to this work since Yuan Mei often employed ghostwriters, and the painters were minor artists whose extant works are few. Moreover, textual accounts of the scroll in general lack the necessary information to identify the work. However, due to its having the highest artistic execution, I argue that the Shanghai scroll is the closest to the original. Though they give rise to debates over their authenticity, the copies speak of the popularity of the painting's subject and depicted individuals.

Chapter Six: Portraits and Paintings Related to the *Thirteen Female Disciples* Scroll

The *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll, while a distinctive monument to a particular time, place, and coterie of talented people, also represents the broader genre of female portraiture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, more specifically, the popularity of portraits of women writers and artists. To provide art-historical context and consider further how such images shaped the public identities of these women, this chapter introduces portraits of Luo Qilan, who appears in the smaller painting mounted with *Thirteen Female Disciples*, and portraits of Luo's friend Wang Yuyan 王玉燕, an accomplished painter. The chapter concludes with a brief consideration of paintings by Luo and Wang to supplement my argument on the importance of male support in the artistic and social lives of talented women.

6.1 Luo Qilan and Her Multiple Identities

As a woman with literary and artistic talents, Luo Qilan (art names: Peixiang 佩香 and Qiuting 秋亭) led an unconventional life that began in the second half of the eighteenth century and continued into the early nineteenth century.¹ She was born into a family that resided in the

¹ I refer to the following sources for Luo Qilan's biography: Li Junzhi 李濬之, *Qinghuaqia shishi* 清畫家詩史, *guishang* 癸上, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian* 三十三種清代人物傳記資料彙編, vol. 40 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 493; Shi Shuyi 施淑儀, *Qingdai guige shiren zhenglue* 清代閨閣詩人徵略, *juan* 6, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian*, vol. 41 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 81; Feng Jinbo 馮金伯, *Moxiangju huashi* 墨香居畫識, *juan* 9, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian*, vol. 43 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 108; Wang Wenzhi's preface for Luo Qilan's poetry anthology in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji* 聽秋軒詩集, reprinted in *Qingdai shiwen ji huibian* 清代詩文集彙編, vol. 446 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010), 763–65; Xiao Mu 蕭穆 and Zhang Shaotang 張紹棠, *Xuzuan Jurong xianzhi* 續纂句容縣志, *juan* 14, reprinted in *Zhongguo difangzhi jicheng Jiangsufu xianzhi ji* 中國地方志集成江蘇府縣志輯, vol. 35 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1991), 359. For resources in English and translations of Luo's writings, see Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, "Luo Qilan," in *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 612–20; Robyn Hamilton, "The Unseen Hand: Contextualizing

Juqu village 句曲里 of Jurong 句容, in modern Jiangsu province.² For many generations, her family had produced scholars and could trace its ancestral line back to the Tang poet Luo Binwang 駱賓王 (ca. 640–84).³ As indicated in one of her writings, Luo Qilan received from her father an education in poetry from a young age.⁴

Luo Qilan married a scholar named Gong Shizhi 龔世治, a native of Jinling 金陵 (modern Nanjing), with whom she shared a life with similar literary interests in Guangling 廣陵 (modern Yangzhou). The Qing scholar Wang Wenzhi touched upon the couple's harmonious marital life: "Qilan liked to compose poetry, and Shizhi liked to write both poetry and *ci* verses. In Guangling, a prosperous place, day and night Qilan and Shizhi closed their door and composed poems in response to the compositions of one another" 綺蘭好為詩, 世治兼好為詞, 廣陵繁華之地, 綺蘭與世治獨日夕閉門相倡和.⁵ When the couple grew tired of the clamor of

Luo Qilan and Her Anthologies," in *The Inner Quarters and Beyond: Women Writers from Ming through Qing*, ed. Grace Fong and Ellen Widmer (Leiden, NLD: Brill, 2010), 112–16.

² Wang Wenzhi's preface to Luo Qilan's poetry anthology mentions that the "Luo family lives in Juqu" 駱氏居句曲. *Juqu* refers to Mount Juqu 句曲山, also known as Mount Mao 茅山, in Luo Qilan's hometown, Jurong. Cheng Wen 程文, *Jurong xianzhi* 句容縣志 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji shudian yingyin, 1981), 4.1a. In one of Luo Qilan's poems commemorating her trip to Mount Mao, she mentions that she was born in Juqu village. Robyn Hamilton translates the poem in "The Unseen Hand: Contextualizing Luo Qilan and Her Anthologies," 113.

³ In his preface to Luo Qilan's poetry anthology, Wang Wenzhi mentions that "generations [of the Luos] have [taken up] the profession of the Confucian scholar" 世業儒. Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, 763. In his inscription for Luo Qilan's painting, *Tutoring My Daughter by the Autumn Lamp*, Yuan Mei writes: "female historian Peixiang (Luo Qilan) is from Binwang's (Luo Binwang) clan" 佩香女史賓王族. Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan* 聽秋軒贈言, *juan* 1, in *Jiangnan nüxing bieji* 江南女性別集, *erbian shangce* 二編上冊, ed. Hu Xiaoming 胡曉明 and Peng Guozhong 彭國忠 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2010), 724.

⁴ "Lan (Qilan), since childhood, learned poetry with my late father; when [I still had my] hair down, [I] already knew the laws of rhythm" 蘭自幼從先君學詩; 垂髮時即解聲律. Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan guizhong tongren ji* 聽秋軒閨中同人集, in *Jiangnan nüxing bieji* 江南女性別集, *erbian shangce* 二編上冊, ed. Hu Xiaoming 胡曉明 and Peng Guozhong 彭國忠 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2010), 695.

⁵ This text is in Wang Wenzhi's preface to Luo Qilan's poetry anthology. Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, 763–64. Guangling was another name of Yangzhou. Akedang's 阿克當阿, *Yangzhoufu zhi* 揚州府志, *juanzhiwu yange* 卷之五沿革 (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1974), 347. As Tobie Meyer-Fong states in her book on early-Qing Yangzhou, "the walled city of Yangzhou was the administrative center of a sizable prefecture from which three departments and six counties were governed." She also notes that "seventeenth-century writers most often referred to the administrative unit that in their time was known as Yangzhou by the culturally resonant name of Guangling, which had fallen out of administrative use after the Song." Tobie Meyer-Fong, *Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2003), 6 and 8.

Guangling, they moved beyond the western walled city of Dantu, in modern Zhenjiang.⁶ Their fulfilling marital life, however, did not last long. When Luo was in her thirties, Gong passed away and left her without a son.⁷ She returned to her natal family, did not remarry, and raised an adopted daughter.⁸ After the death of Gong, Luo lived in Runzhou 潤州 and Jinkou 京口, both in modern Zhenjiang.⁹ There she also built her Tingqiu Studio, literally “listening-to-autumn studio,” for which she named her poetry anthology.¹⁰

⁶ See Wang Wenzhi’s preface to Luo Qilan’s poetry anthology in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, 764. For Dantu and Zhenjiang, see Yang Lütai 楊履泰, *Dantu xianzhi* 丹徒縣志, *juan* 1 (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1970), 31.

⁷ After analyzing Luo Qilan’s poems, Lin Yu-chin argues that Gong Shizhi passed away when Luo was about thirty-three or thirty-four. Lin Yu-chin, “Luo Qilan ji qi zuopin yanjiu 駱綺蘭及其作品研究” (master’s thesis, Tunghai University, 2010), 38. According to Luo Qilan, she had no son of her own: “for twenty years, sweetness and bitterness [I have] fully experienced and tasted; [I] grieve for not having a son and shed tears in several lines” 廿年甘苦飽經營, 自恨無兒淚幾行. Luo Qilan, “He Shiyun shuzu jianzeng yuanyun sishou 和石雲叔祖見贈原韻四首,” in *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, *juan* 5, 802–03.

⁸ In a local gazetteer of Jurong, the entry of Luo Qilan mentions that she “returned to her natal family and raised the fatherless” 歸母氏撫孤. Xiao Mu and Zhang Shaotang, *Xuzuan Jurong xianzhi*, *juan* 14, 359. In his preface for Luo Qilan’s poetry anthology, Yuan Mei called Luo Qilan’s daughter *minglingnü* 螟蛉女, or “*mingling* girl.” Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, 762. *Mingling* is the moth caterpillar. In the past, people thought that an insect, *guoluo* 蝓, stole and raised the caterpillar as its own offspring. Therefore, the term *mingling* refers to adopted children. I have yet to find information of the girl’s identity and biological parents.

⁹ The Qing scholar Zhu Delin 祝德麟 wrote: “Luo Qilan, the female historian of Juqu, married Gong and then lived as a widow in Runzhou” 句曲女史駱佩香嫁于龔而寡居潤州. Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, *juan* 3, 784. Luo Qilan indicated that her husband once moved the family to Runzhou. Thus, it is possible that after Gong Shizhi passed away in Runzhou, Luo Qilan continued to live there. Luo Qilan, “Zi Caozhou yi xianjiu jiu gui zhigan sanshou 自曹州移先舅柩歸志感三首,” in *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, *juan* 5, 808. Runzhou, literally “Run state,” was established by the Sui and Tang dynasties. In the Song dynasty, Runzhou was elevated to Zhenjiang fu 鎮江府. Yu Xilu 俞希魯, *Zhishun Zhenjiang zhi* 至順鎮江志, *juan shou* 卷首 (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1975), 20–3. Luo Qilan also lived in Jinkou 京口, also located in modern Zhenjiang. Yuan Mei wrote: “In winter of the *xinhai* year [1791], [Luo Qilan] brought a message from Jinkou, called herself [my] female disciple, and received [my] instruction in poetry” 辛亥冬從京口執訊來, 自稱女弟子, 以詩授業. Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua buyi* 隨園詩話補遺, *juan* 3, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 3, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 622. According to Zuo Yong 左壩: “[When] the Master [Yuan Mei] comes to Jinkou, [he] often stays in Peixiang [Luo Qilan] cousin’s residence” 先生來京口, 每住于佩香表姊家. Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan bashi shouyan* 隨園八十壽言, *juan* 2, in *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集, vol. 6, ed. Wang Yingzhi (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 15. The name Jinkou first appeared during the Three Kingdoms period. Yang Qi 楊榮, *Jinkou shanshui zhi* 京口山水志, *juan shou* 卷首 (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1970), 22.

¹⁰ The Qing scholar Zhao Yi 趙翼 passed by Jinkou, wishing to visit Luo Qilan; however, she was not at home. Afterward, Zhao wrote about his visit and mentioned Luo’s newly built Tingqiu Studio. Therefore, we know Luo had this studio in Jinkou, in modern Zhenjiang. Zhao Yi, “Juchao jiangui tuoji Jinkou Peixiang nüshi 巨超將歸託寄京口佩香女史,” in *Oubei ji* 甌北集 (China: Zhanyitang, 1812), 42.15a.

During her middle age, Luo Qilan enjoyed visiting scenic places and religious sites, mostly in her native region (modern Jiangsu province), associating with male and female intellectuals, and engaging in various literary and artistic activities. She often received male and female scholars, including Yuan Mei, in her Tingqiu Studio.¹¹ Later in life, she became a lay Buddhist practitioner.¹² To her contemporaries and later generations, Luo was an accomplished poet and painter. Most of her extant poems were written after she became a widow.¹³ She was a student of Yuan Mei, Wang Wenzhi, and Wang Chang, three famous scholars of her time.¹⁴ Through the connections of these three gentlemen, she developed relationships with many learned men and women. During her widowhood, Luo had three poetry anthologies published: *Poems from the Tingqiu Studio* 聽秋軒詩集, *Poems of Tribute to the Tingqiu Studio* 聽秋軒贈言, and *Poems to the Tingqiu Studio from My Companions in Women's Quarter* 聽秋軒閨中同人集.¹⁵ The first includes Luo's poems, and the others contain writings she received from her male and female contemporaries. These three volumes not only represent the literary achievements of Luo as a poet and editor but also provide clues to her private and social lives. Luo Qilan was also

¹¹ According to Zuo Yong, Yuan Mei stayed with Luo Qilan whenever he visited Jingkou. Zuo's writing is in Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan bashi shouyan*, *juan* 2, 15. Yuan Mei's letters to Luo Qilan also record his stays in her residence. Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan, fu laishu* 付來書, in *Jiangnan nüxing bieji* 江南女性別集, *erbian shangce* 二編上冊, ed. Hu Xiaoming 胡曉明 and Peng Guozhong 彭國忠 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2010), 786, 788, and 790.

¹² According to Robyn Hamilton, Luo Qilan was a lay Buddhist practitioner. Robyn Hamilton, "The Pursuit of Fame: Luo Qilan (1755–1813?) and the Debates about Women and Talent in Eighteenth-century Jiangnan," *Late Imperial China* 18.1 (1997): 50. Luo's contemporary Jiang Baoling 蔣寶齡 mentioned that she is knowledgeable in the theories of Chan Buddhism 深於禪理. Jiang Baoling, "Nüshi gong shuhua 女史工書畫," in *Molin jinhua* 墨林今話 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1992), 156.

¹³ Wang Wenzhi's preface to Luo Qilan's poetry anthology mentions: "Now, most of the extant poems [by Luo Qilan] were created after the death of Shizhi" 今所存之詩多世治逝後作也. Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, 764.

¹⁴ Luo Qilan mentioned the three as her teachers in her preface to *Poems to the Tingqiu Studio from My Companions in Women's Quarter*. Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan guizhong tongren ji*, 695.

¹⁵ Robyn Hamilton examines Luo Qilan's role as an editor and the relationships between her and the writers included in *Poems of Tribute to the Tingqiu Studio* and *Poems to the Tingqiu Studio from My Companions in Women's Quarter* in "The Unseen Hand: Contextualizing Luo Qilan and Her Anthologies," 107–40. On page 109, he mentions that the two titles were published in 1796. *Poems from the Tingqiu Studio* has many editions; according to Lin Yu-chin, they were published after 1795. Lin Yu-chin, "Luo Qilan ji qi zuopin yanjiu," 6–8.

skilled in “painting from life” (*xiasheng* 寫生) and was especially fond of painting orchids. Her paintings now survive in museums and private collections or are known through textual accounts.

In the social circle of Yuan Mei, Luo Qilan was one woman whose public identity was shaped in part by portraits paired with inscriptions by her male and female contemporaries. Some of these portraits survive, and others are known through textual records. They show her in a variety of roles: she appears as a sightseeing poet in *Spring View at Pingshan* 平山春望圖, a dutiful mother in *Tutoring My Daughter by the Autumn Lamp* 秋燈課女圖, and a religious devotee in *Returning to the Way* 歸道圖.¹⁶ In *Pictures of Eight Dreams* 八夢圖, she was even shown in roles she was unable to occupy as a woman, such as government official and army general.¹⁷ The many Qing literati who inscribed these portraits often wrote about the depictions of Luo Qilan, of her identities known to her contemporaries, and their ideas of who she really was. These colophons are evidence of the circulation of the portraits, through which Luo’s perceived identities were promoted to a broader audience. Through their literary compositions that accompanied the portraits, these male scholars took part in promoting Luo’s various public identities. The painter of *Spring View at Pingshan* also assisted this process through his artistic choices. The first part of this chapter focuses on the touring poet depicted in *Spring View at Pingshan*; the later part discusses Luo Qilan’s other portraits and identities, primarily through examinations of related Qing texts.

¹⁶ *Spring View at Pingshan* is in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing. The other two paintings are documented in textual records.

¹⁷ For reproductions, see the Sotheby’s auction catalogue, *Fine Classical Chinese Paintings* (New York: Sotheby’s, 2012), 20–21.

Spring View at Pingshan (fig. 6.1) was painted by Ding Yicheng 丁以誠 (active late 18th–early 19th century).¹⁸ Upon opening the handscroll, one first encounters the painting’s title, written in large characters by Wang Wenzhi, who also inscribed the title for the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll. As Wang was a famous scholar-calligrapher and poetry teacher of Luo Qilan, it was appropriate that he would be responsible for the frontispiece. Following the title panel is a painting depicting three land masses divided by water and mist. On the right, the picture begins with a bridge connecting the first and second masses of land. Of the first, only a corner appears; the second is filled with porous rocks and trees with pink blossoms that identify the season as spring. In the background, emerging from the mist, a pavilion stands. Unrolling the scroll further, one sees the third piece of land, with hills and pines. Under a pine tree is Luo Qilan, wearing a blue dress and leaning against a large rock. A few steps away from her is a young servant, who turns back toward Luo while pointing forward, as if she is suggesting that Luo might travel on a nearby boat to reach the land of blossoming trees. In the lower left corner of the composition are the signature and two seals of the painter.

Judging from information in Qing sources about Ding Yicheng (art name: Yimen 義門), he was a professional painter with some education.¹⁹ Ding was able to write poetry and play the strategic game *weiqi* as well as paint figures and landscapes. His training in figure painting came from his background, for he was born within a family that produced generations of portrait

¹⁸ Wang Wenzhi’s colophon mentions Ding Yicheng as the painter. In addition, Ding also left his name and seals in the lower left corner of the picture. The brief inscription by the painter reads, “Yimen Ding Yicheng made” 義門丁以誠製, and the two seals are Yicheng 以誠 and Yimen 義門. For reproductions of this handscroll, see Yang Xin 楊新, *Ming Qing xiaoxianghua* 明清肖像畫 (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2008), 205–07.

¹⁹ Biographical information of Ding is found in the following two sources: Wang Yun 汪鏗, *Yangzhou huayuan lu* 揚州畫苑錄, *juan* 3, reprinted in *Qingdai difang renwu zhuanji congkan* 清代地方人物傳記叢刊, vol. 6 (Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2007), 409; Jiang Baoling, “Ding Hezhou zhuan chuanzhen xinling erjuan 丁鶴洲撰傳真心領二卷,” in *Molin jinhua*, 55.

painters.²⁰ In addition, Ding taught painting and wrote an appendix to *Understanding Portrait Painting* 傳真心領, a manual compiled by his father, Ding Gao 丁皋.²¹ Ding Yicheng's capabilities in literati pastimes such as poetry and *weiqi* likely facilitated his acceptance into literati circles, explaining his authorship of *Spring View at Pingshan*. In addition to this portrait of Luo Qilan, Ding Yicheng also painted a portrait for Wang Yicheng 汪詣成, the husband of Luo Qilan's friend, Wang Yuyan.²²

Following the painting are colophons by Luo Qilan's male contemporaries. These included her literary teachers, Yuan Mei and Wang Wenzhi. Mao Yuanming 茅元銘, Zhou Zhigui 周之桂, and Zeng Ao (who also inscribed the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll) were all acquaintances of Yuan Mei.²³ Yuan Tong 袁通 (b. 1775) was one of Yuan Mei's sons, and Chen Ji 陳基 (1771–1845) was the husband of Jin Yi, the woman shown holding up a fan in the *Thirteen Female Disciples*; Yuan Tong and Chen Ji were ghostwriters for Yuan Mei, as mentioned in chapter 5. Lu Yingsu 陸應宿 was a son of Yuan Mei's nephew, Lu Jian 陸建.²⁴

²⁰ His father Ding Gao 丁皋, grandfather Ding Siming 丁思銘, great-grandfather Ding Yihou 丁依侯, and great-great-grandfather Ding Yuchen 丁雨辰 were all portrait painters. The publisher of *Understanding Portrait Painting* 傳真心領, a portrait-painting manual by Ding Gao, mentions Ding Yicheng's family in the introduction. See “Chuanzhen xinling jianjie 傳真心領簡介,” in Ding Gao, *Chuangzhen xinling* 傳真心領 (Beijing: Renming meishu chubanshe, 2004).

²¹ Ding Gao compiled *Understanding Portrait Painting* to transmit the methods of portrait painting passed down in the Ding family. Ding Yicheng's appendix is called *Eight Questions of Tuexuexuan* 退學軒問答八則 in which he recorded questions on portrait painting in his own voice. Ding, *Chuangzhen xinling*, 165–70. Li Dou 李斗 writes about Ding Gao, Ding Yicheng, and *Understanding Portrait Painting* in his *Yangzhou huafang lu* 揚州畫舫錄 (Yangzhou: Jiangsu Guangling guji keyinshe, 1984), 44–6.

²² The painting, *Whiling Away the Summer at A Lakeside Estate* 湖莊消夏圖, is recorded in Pang Yuanji 龐元濟, *Xuzhai minghua lu* 虛齋名畫錄, vol. 2 (Taipei: Hanhua wenhua shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 1971), 753–57.

²³ Yuan Mei recorded his stay with Mao Yuanming in his *Suiyuan shihua* 隨園詩話, *juan* 13, in *Yuan Mei quanji*, vol. 3, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 443–44. For Zhou Zhigui, Yuan Mei wrote about his association with the Zhou family in his *Suiyuan shihua buyi*, *juan* 2, 601–02.

²⁴ Yuan Mei wrote a biography for Lu Jian, the oldest son of his sister. Yuan Mei, “Meijun xiaozhuan 湄君小傳,” in *Xiaocangshan fang wenji* 小倉山房文集, *juan* 7, in *Yuan Mei quanji*, vol. 2, ed. Wang Yingzhi 王英志 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), 128–29. Yuan Tong, a son of Yuan Mei, wrote a biography for Lu Yingsu and referred to Lu as a son of Lu Jian. Yuan Tong's writing is included in Lu Yingsu's publication. Yuan Tong, “Lu

Many of these writers were Yuan Mei's acquaintances and relatives, and Luo likely came to know them through her association with Yuan. In general, women who wished to pursue literary fame were limited by social conventions and lacked the necessary connections to make their names known. For Luo Qilan, a widow without prominent male family members, becoming Yuan Mei's student allowed her to expand her social circle to a network of male mentors who could provide essential contacts.

It is also possible that Yuan Mei or Wang Wenzhi requested some colophons for Luo Qilan, their female friend and poetry student. Their letters tell of them facilitating the social exchanges between their acquaintances and female disciples. For example, Luo Qilan asked Yuan Mei to request a colophon from Zhu Delin 祝德麟 for her self-portrait, *Tutoring My Daughter by the Autumn Lamp*.²⁵ Zeng Ao entrusted his painting, *Peonies* 芍藥圖, to Yuan Mei and asked him to collect colophons by women in Yuan's social circle.²⁶ And a relative of Wang Wenzhi asked him for Luo Qilan's inscriptions on two handscrolls.²⁷

In his colophon to *Spring View at Pingshan*, Wang Wenzhi described the circumstances surrounding the creation of the painting, in addition to his own composition. Wang's colophon consists of three parts: his transcription of Luo Qilan's poem, the poem he composed for the painting, and a brief text recording the subject and painter. As Wang wrote:

During the first year of Jiaqing reign [1796], in spring, female disciple Peixiang
[Luo Qilan] roamed about Guangling and composed *Poem on Spring View at*

Xiaoyun zhuan 陸小雲傳," in *Xiaoyun shiji* 筱雲詩集, reprinted in *Qingdai shiwen ji huibian* 清代詩文集彙編, vol. 453 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2009), 2.

²⁵ Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, juan 3, 784.

²⁶ Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, fu laishu, 790.

²⁷ Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, fu laishu, 793.

Pingshan. Mr. Ding Yimen [Ding Yicheng] painted the picture for her. I transcribed her original poem at the end of the scroll.

嘉慶元年春日，佩香女弟子遊廣陵，作平山春望詩，義門丁先生為之繪圖，余為錄原唱於卷尾。

Through Wang's text, we know that *Spring View at Pingshan* is a portrait of Luo Qilan, intended to represent her sightseeing and to complement her poem.

To the northwest beyond Guangling, or the Qing city of Yangzhou, was an area full of scenic places and historical sites, and many literati composed commemorations of their visits there. Pingshan was one of these attractions, and by the end of the nineteenth century, two publications on Pingshan were already in circulation: Wang Yingeng 汪應庚 compiled *Records of Beholding Beautiful Scenes of Pingshan* 平山攬勝志, comprising writings from successive dynasties on famous places around Pingshan Hall 平山堂; Zhao Zhibi 趙之璧 published *Pictorial Records of Pingshan Hall* 平山堂圖志, containing imperial writings about Pingshan Hall, pictures of nearby scenic spots, introductory entries of places to visit around the hall, and writings from successive dynasties on these places.²⁸ According to these two books, famous places in the area included Red Bridge 紅橋, Ocean of the Law Temple 法海寺 (also known as

²⁸ Tobie Meyer-Fong devotes a chapter in her book on early-Qing Yangzhou to Pingshan, also known as Pingshan Hall. Meyer-Fong, *Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou*, 128–64. Pingshan Hall is on the Shu Ridge 蜀岡 that is located northwest of Qing-period Yangzhou. The hall derived its fame from the founder Ouyang Xiu (1007–72), the renowned scholar of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127). Ouyang Xiu built the hall when he served as the Yangzhou magistrate and used it for social and leisure activities. Male literati of the Song, Ming, and Qing periods continued to renovate the hall. Due to Pingshan Hall's associations with the great scholar and its related activities conducted by male elites, the hall became a cultural symbol of Yangzhou. The publications of Wang and Zhao were published together in *Pingshan lansheng zhi, Pingshantang tuzhi* 平山攬勝志, 平山堂圖志 (Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2004).

Lianxing Temple 蓮性寺), Shu Ridge 蜀岡, and Guanyin Pavilion 觀音閣, along with Pingshan Hall. Two colophons of *Spring View at Pingshan* mention the Red Bridge, and one includes Yangzhou. Thus, the Pingshan that Luo Qilan visited was the Pingshan Hall recorded in these publications.

As mentioned earlier, Luo Qilan lived with her sympathetic husband for three years in Yangzhou. Possibly due to her attachment to the city and its popular attractions, she visited many famous places in Yangzhou and composed commemorative poems. However, her poem about the scenery surrounding Pingshan Hall was singled out for *Spring View at Pingshan*. Pingshan Hall was founded by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072), a famous scholar and government official of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1124), who used the place for social and leisure activities. As indicated by published writings by Wang Yinggeng and Zhao Zhibi, scholars often wrote of the Pingshan Hall, most likely for its connection to the admired Ouyang Xiu. In these writings, the authors often referred either to the terms “Pingshan Hall” or “Pingshan.” For example, while Chen Tingjing 陳廷敬 titled his poem “Pingshan Hall,” Huang Zhouxing 黃周星, Zong Yuanding 宗元鼎, and Xu Chengxuan 許承宣, like Luo Qilan, called their compositions “Spring View at Pingshan.”²⁹ Therefore, when male scholars read the title of Luo’s poem, they would have recognized her participation in a popular literati pastime of leisurely touring and writing poetry in response to famous places.

In her poem, Luo Qilan described what she observed, heard, and felt at the site. The spring scenery, the gentle breeze, and the sound of the Buddhist meal chime all combined to inspire poetic thoughts. Her poem reads:

²⁹ Wang Yinggeng, *Pingshan lansheng zhi*, 89, 92, 92, and 122.

Spring dawn tiptoes across the peaks.	春曉躡峰頂，
Spring wind blows my garment.	春風吹我衣。
The peach blossoms blow about to end in the water.	桃花隨水盡，
The sound of [wind in the] pines enters the clouds and grows faint.	松籟入雲微。
[I] do not sense that my hometown is far away.	未覺家山遠，
Gradually [I] hear the Buddhist meal chime in the distance.	漸聞齋磬稀。
Lingering about to be awakened by a flash of insight.	徘徊將有悟，
Beyond the lake already slanting are the rays of the evening sun.	湖外已斜暉。 ³⁰

In fact, the poem records the religious aspect of Pingshan Hall. While the hall had a scholarly image through its association with Ouyang Xiu and many literati of successive dynasties who wrote of the place and contributed to its renovations, one Qing account states that it had been incorporated into a monastery.³¹ Proximity to a monastery explains the reference to the Buddhist chime, but Luo Qilan's decision to include this sound may also reflect her religious interests. As noted earlier, she became a lay Buddhist practitioner later in life.

Pingshan Hall was a subject for many artists inspired by famous sites of Yangzhou.³² In *Spring View at Pingshan*, Ding Yicheng painted an idealized landscape that focused on Luo

³⁰ Luo Qilan included this poem in her poetry anthology. The seventh line in the printed version is slightly different from Wang Wenzhi's transcription. The printed version is: "lingering as if being awakened by a flash of insight" 徘徊如有悟. Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, juan 4, 797.

³¹ Akedang'a, *Yangzhoufu zhi*, juan zhi sanshiyi guji er 卷之三十一古蹟二, 2048.

³² Gao Xiang 高翔 (1688–1754), one of the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou, created *Eight Views of Pingshan Hall* 平山堂八景. This album is in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing, and reproductions are in Lu Fusheng 卢

Qilan and excluded the figures of other visitors. Visual elements in the painting correspond to Luo's poem: the pink blossoms hint at the spring season, the water stands for the lake mentioned in the last line, and the swaying willow trees and the pine trees at the end of the composition suggest the breeze implied in the poem. Porous garden rocks and a bridge with a balustrade indicate a highly groomed environment and the renovations done by literati of successive dynasties.³³ Leaning against a rock, Luo Qilan has a tranquil facial expression and a languid posture, as if she is in a deep poetic or even religious meditation. The slight turn of her gaze toward her maid suggests that she has just been awakened by her servant's call or by the temple chime in the distance. With the correspondence between Luo's words and Ding's picture, viewers are able to interpret the scene from Luo Qilan's perspective.

By avoiding visual conventions commonly seen in paintings of beautiful women, Ding Yicheng allows the viewer to consider Luo Qilan as a poet rather than focus on her physical appearance. By the mid-Qing period, *meiren hua* 美人畫, literally "beautiful-woman paintings," that depict generic beauties had become particularly popular; the compositions, settings, and other pictorial elements provide clues to the identities of the sitters and functions of the paintings.³⁴ *Woman in a Weed-Grown Garden Gazing at Rabbits* (fig. 6.2) is one example that shows an elaborately dressed woman sitting in a landscape.³⁵ She casts her gaze downward at the

辅圣, *Zhongguo wenrenhua shi* 中国文人画史 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2012), 559. Another example is *Picture of Pingshan Hall* 平山堂圖 painted and inscribed by Wang Yun 汪鋈 in 1879. This hanging scroll is in the collection of the Yangzhou Museum. For a reproduction, see Yangzhou bowuguan 揚州博物館, *Yangzhou yuanlin jia tianxia: Yangzhou bowuguan guancang huaben jicui* 揚州園林甲天下: 揚州博物館館藏畫本集粹 (Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2003), 120.

³³ Meyer-Fong, *Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou*, 130.

³⁴ James Cahill's book on beautiful-woman paintings of the high Qing period analyzes and interprets visual conventions of these works. James Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure: Vernacular Painting in High Qing China* (Berkeley: University of California, 2010).

³⁵ The painting is in the collection of the Shanghai Museum. For a reproduction and analysis of the painting, see Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure*, 178–81.

three rabbits, a male and two females, in the lower right corner of the painting. As Cahill notes, the inclusion of these three invites the viewer to speculate about the woman's personal romance.³⁶ Surrounding her are overgrown weeds, a metaphor that suggests she has been left alone by her husband or lover for too long. She is depicted close to life size, allowing a viewer to observe her face and costume closely. The large scale of the painting and its pictorial content—a beauty waiting for an absent man— suggests that it was possibly hung in a woman's room because it implicated the owner's feeling and situation.³⁷

In *Spring View at Pingshan*, Ding Yicheng did place Luo Qilan in a landscape setting, but his depiction prevents us from viewing her as a generic beauty. The handscroll format, which typically needs to be unrolled section by section for viewing, and the placement of Luo at the end of the composition make her much less accessible than the woman in *Woman in a Weed-Grown Garden Gazing at Rabbits*. Her body is properly clothed, covered in a modest blue robe and a white skirt; her hairstyle is simple but neat. Her only ornamentation is a bracelet on her right wrist. The lack of details on her face and costume could be due to the concern with her identity: a woman from a respectable family was not supposed to be closely scrutinized. Unlike the weeds and rabbits in the other painting, there are no visual indicators that would lead a viewer to speculate on her personal romance. In addition, as we are reminded by her poem, she lingers and waits for poetic or religious inspiration, not men. As Wang Wenzhi's colophon reminds us, the work was made to represent Luo Qilan's visit to Pingshan Hall, noted for its scholarly and spiritual quality.

In *Spring View at Pingshan*, Luo Qilan is shown cultivating herself through poetic or religious contemplation in nature, a representation more common in portraits of male scholars.

³⁶ Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure*, 178.

³⁷ Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure*, 165–66.

Many Qing-dynasty portrait painters placed their male subjects within landscapes, sitting or leaning against rocks, sometimes alone and sometimes in the company of their servants. In *Portrait of Zhu Kuishi* 朱葵石像 (fig. 6.3), the scholar and government official sits under pine trees by a bridge and leans on a rock.³⁸ Smiling and turning his head toward the nearby river, he appears to be enjoying the scenery or the sound of the water. Song Zhi 宋致, in *Listening to the Wind in the Pines* 靜聽松風 (fig. 6.4), also sits by a rock under a pine tree.³⁹ He faces forward, meeting the gaze of the viewer. The pine tree, a scholarly symbol of fortitude, is a shared motif in the above three portraits. In addition, the peaceful facial expressions and relaxed postures of Luo, Zhu, and Song make them appear self-sufficient and comfortable in their surroundings.

In showing Luo Qilan outside her home and enjoying famous scenery, *Spring View at Pingshan* represents an unconventional aspect of her life after the death of her husband: roaming about the Jiangnan area to visit famous sites. Many of her trips were local, within modern southwestern Jiangsu province. Her destinations include attractions around the areas of modern Yangzhou 揚州, Nanjing 南京, Zhenjiang 鎮江, and her hometown, Jurong 句容. Occasionally, she went beyond these places, to Suzhou 蘇州 in southeastern Jiangsu and to Hangzhou 杭州 in modern Zhejiang.

Some of these destinations were Buddhist and Daoist sites. At the beginning of volume three 卷三 of *Poems from the Tingqiu Studio*, a series of poems are devoted to her visit to Mount Mao 茅山, a renowned Daoist site in Jurong.⁴⁰ (The distance between Jurong and Zhenjiang,

³⁸ For reproductions of this painting, see Yang Xin, *Ming Qing xiaoxianghua*, 104–05.

³⁹ For reproductions of this painting, see Yang Xin, *Ming Qing xiaoxianghua*, 144–45.

⁴⁰ The titles of these poems are “Qianyuanguan 乾元觀,” “Deng Maoshan jue ding 登茅山絕頂,” “Yuchenguan 玉晨觀,” “Su Huayangdong yiyunge tibi 宿華陽洞衣雲閣題壁,” and “Maoshan lizhen fengyu weigui cheng Menlou shi yi shi jianji ciyun you zuo 茅山禮真風雨未歸承夢樓師以詩見寄次韻有作.” Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, *juan* 3, 780–81. For more information on Mount Mao, see Cheng Wen, *Jurong xianzhi*, 4.1ab.

where Luo lived after the death of her husband, is about thirty-eight kilometers.⁴¹) From one poem, we know that religious devotion motivated Luo Qilan to travel and that her female friends were her potential travel companions:

But this spring my women friends and I
Lit incense, abstained from eating meat,
And set a date to make the pilgrimage:
Finally my wish was to be fulfilled!⁴²

Luo Qilan also visited Buddhist destinations, including Gaomin Temple 高旻寺, one of the eight great temples of Yangzhou during the Qing dynasty.⁴³ (The distance between Yangzhou and Zhenjiang is about twenty-five kilometers.) One of Luo Qilan's poems speaks of her interest in Buddhism and her delight to be enlightened by a monk:

...

By chance [I] encounter an eminent monk	偶然遇高僧,
[Who] discusses Chan [Buddhism] and brews green tea.	談禪煮清茗.
I am originally a dull-spirited person.	我本鈍根人,
The wonderful dharma [teaching] reveals impartiality.	妙法示平等.

⁴¹ To calculate distances between places in the Jiangsu province, I use the map in Tanaka Keiji 田中啓爾, *Chūgoku daichizu: Sōfuriganatsuki, shudaizu, bunshōzu* 中国大地図: 総振仮名付, 主題図, 分省図 (Tokyo: Kyobunkaku, 1973), plate 9.

⁴² Translation in Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China*, 615.

⁴³ For information about Gaomin Temple from a Qing perspective, see Li Dou, *Yangzhou huafang lu*, 154–55.

[From the] edge of the clouds the sound of the bell is heard. 雲際鐘聲來，
Effortlessly [from my] worldly dream [I] awaken. 悠然塵夢醒。⁴⁴

The poem suggests that a spiritual quest became part of this trip.

Social activities and sightseeing also led Luo Qilan away from her house. According to a number of texts, Luo Qilan was accompanied by male and female family members and nonrelatives when she toured local attractions. Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1729–1814), a Qing scholar, government official, and friend of Luo’s teacher, Wang Wenzhi, recorded that she accompanied him to visit the attractions in Jingkou.⁴⁵ Several poems at the end of volume one in Luo Qilan’s *Poems from the Tingqiu Studio* are about her trip to Jinling.⁴⁶ (Jinling, or modern Nanjing, is about sixty kilometers from Zhenjiang.) In addition to touring the Qixia 棲霞 area, she paid respect to Yuan Mei in his Harmony Garden 隨園.⁴⁷ One poem mentions that Luo invited her male cousin Lancheng 蘭成 and Lady Wanxiang 畹鄉夫人 to accompany her.⁴⁸ Luo Qilan also

⁴⁴ Luo Qilan, “Zhou bo Gaominsi 舟泊高旻寺,” *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, juan 4, 795.

⁴⁵ In his book on Wang Wenzhi, Wang Ping devoted a quarter of chapter 2 to the friendship between Wang Wenzhi and Zhao Yi. Wang Ping 王平, *Tanhua fengya Menglou shi: Wang Wenzhi yanjiu* 探花风雅梦楼诗: 王文治研究 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2006), 98–114. For the sightseeing of Zhao Yi and Luo Qilan, see Zhao Yi, “Jingkou tong Peixiang nüshi you Zhaoyinsi Shiziku Bagongdong Lügailou zhusheng 京口同佩香女史遊招隱寺獅子窟八公洞綠蓋樓諸勝,” in *Oubei ji*, 43.6ab.

⁴⁶ These poems are “Yue Wanxiang furen ji Lancheng biaodi you Qixia 約畹鄉夫人暨蘭成表弟遊棲霞,” “Qixia kan hongye guo Deyun’an yong bijian yun 棲霞看紅葉過德雲菴用壁間韻,” “Qixia yuyu tong Wanxiang furen 棲霞遇雨同畹鄉夫人,” and “Suiyuan ye Yuan Jianzhai shi ershou 隨園謁袁簡齋師二首.” These poems are not dated, so it is uncertain how many trips are recorded. Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, juan 1, 773.

⁴⁷ Qixia is likely Mount Qixia 棲霞山 in modern northeastern Nanjing City 南京市, Jiangsu province. The mountain was named after the Qixia Temple 棲霞寺. For information about Mount Qixia and Qixia Temple, see Yao Nai 姚鼐, *Chongkan Jiangning fuzhi* 重刊江寧府志, *juanzhiliu shanshui* 卷之六山水 (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1974), 230.

⁴⁸ Luo Qilan refers to Lancheng as *biaodi* 表弟, or “younger male cousin.” Lancheng, or Zuo Lancheng, was a native of Dantu 丹徒 and a disciple of Wang Wenzhi. Yao Nai 姚鼐, “Zuo Lancheng shi ti ci 左蘭成詩題辭,” in *Xibaoxuan quanji* 惜抱軒全集 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1960), 221.

joined Wang Wenzhi and his family for leisure events; Wang wrote that she went boating with his family and composed a poem to commemorate the occasion.⁴⁹

A few times, Luo Qilan traveled longer distances; a series of poems in volume six of *Poems from the Tingqiu Studio* record places much farther from her residence. One poem records her visit to Wumen 吳門 (modern Suzhou 蘇州) in autumn.⁵⁰ (Suzhou is in Jiangsu province, about one hundred eighty-five kilometers from Zhenjiang.) She also traveled more than two hundred kilometers to West Lake 西湖, the location of the poetry gathering depicted in *Thirteen Female Disciples*, in northern Zhejiang province.⁵¹ Like many male and some other female scholars, Luo Qilan's experiences of traveling and visiting famous sites inspired her poetry.⁵²

The colophon writers for *Spring View at Pingshan* remarked on Luo Qilan's talent as a nature poet. Zeng Ao compared her with Xie Tiao 謝朓 (464–99; art name: Xuanhui), a famous male poet of the Six Dynasties (220–589) known for his landscape poetry: “The secluded inner chamber has fine verses; how [could these be] inferior to [those by] Xie Xuanhui” 幽閨有佳詠，何減謝玄暉。⁵³ Lu Yingsu interpreted the portrait: “Looking for poetic inspiration, [Luo] further stood on the hilltop” 尋詩更上山頭立。⁵⁴ Yan Wenjun 嚴文俊 mentioned that the surrounding scenery inspired Luo to compose: “[Above] spring water, plum blossoms restlessly [turn] red,

⁴⁹ Wang Wenzhi, *Menglou shiji* 夢樓詩集 (1795), 23.10b.

⁵⁰ The long title of this poem begins with “Qiuri you Wumen” 秋日遊吳門. Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, *juan* 6, 815.

⁵¹ Luo Qilan, “Qiuri Xihu yulou oucheng sishou 秋日西湖寓樓偶成四首,” *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, *juan* 6, 815.

⁵² The late Ming and Qing dynasties witnessed a growing number of women writing of their experiences on the road. Some were the wives, daughters, and mothers of scholars, accompanying these men on their travels, often to their official posts. Others went on pilgrimages for their religious devotions, and married women also visited their natal families who lived in other parts of the nation. Grace Fong studies these women and their writings in “Authoring Journeys: Women on the Road,” in *Herself an Author: Gender, Agency, and Writing in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 2008), 85–120.

⁵³ Zeng Ao, “Ti Peixiang furen Pingshan chunwangtu jici yuanyun 題佩香夫人平山春望圖即次原韻,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, *juan* 3, 760.

⁵⁴ Lu Yingsu, “Ti Peixiang furen Pingshan chunwangtu 題佩香夫人平山春望圖,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, *juan* 3, 761.

dazzling the eyes with their brightness; enjoying the cool and gentle breeze, poetic thoughts frequently appear” 春水桃花紅不定, 撩眼分明, 消受好風清, 詩思頻生.⁵⁵ These writings characterize Luo Qilan as an accomplished poet who roamed about, seeking inspiration from nature.

It is uncertain who commissioned *Spring View at Pingshan* and for what purpose the scroll was made. In addition to Luo Qilan herself, another possible candidate is her poetry teacher, Wang Wenzhi, with whom she had a close relationship. Wang Wenzhi did commission or create paintings for his friends, and one of these recipients was Yuan Mei.⁵⁶ In addition, he had the social status and power to motivate other scholars to compose texts for the painting. If Wang Wenzhi initiated the creation of *Spring View at Pingshan*, this explains why Pingshan Hall was selected as the subject over other Yangzhou attractions that Luo Qilan visited.⁵⁷ To her male literati contemporaries, including Wang Wenzhi, Luo's identity as a poet and her efforts to transmit their teachings and writings were inspiring. In writings that document Luo's poetic capabilities, Wang Wenzhi records that in a gathering of his students, she was the first to complete her composition.⁵⁸ In other words, her literary ability and quick wit surpassed even that of her male contemporaries. Yuan Mei had a similar account; this time, the gathering took place at Red Bridge, one of the Yangzhou attractions mentioned earlier.⁵⁹ Therefore, Pingshan Hall, a

⁵⁵ Yan Wenjun, “Qianti 前題,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, *juan 3*, 761–62.

⁵⁶ Wang Wenzhi and Pan Gongshou 潘恭壽 (b. 1741) collaborated on a painting for Yuan Mei, depicting his dried-up cypress bonsai that had come back to life. The text begins with “Jianzhai qianbei 簡齋前輩.” Wang Wenzhi, *Menglou shiji*, 23.3a.

⁵⁷ In addition to the Gaomin Temple mentioned earlier, other Yangzhou places that Luo Qilan visited include Hanshang 邗上, Xiao Garden 篠園, Gaoyong Tower 高詠樓, and her old residence. Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, 782–83, 790, and 802.

⁵⁸ Wang Wenzhi, “Zhu menren zhao yu Yinlü shantang xiaoji shi Peixiang nüdizi shi xiancheng jici yuanyun 諸門人招余飲綠山堂小集時佩香女弟子詩先成即次元韻,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, *juan 2*, 752.

⁵⁹ Yuan Mei, “Shangsiri Lancheng dizi zhaotong zhumenren Hongqiao xiuxi shi Peixiang nüdizi shi xiancheng jici yuanyun 上巳日蘭成弟子招同諸門人紅橋修禊時佩香女弟子詩先成即次原韻,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, *juan 2*, 757.

place related to Ouyang Xiu and many other scholars, was a more appropriate painting subject than sites that were famous but less associated with literati accomplishments.

Another identity of Luo Qilan was that of a dutiful mother, promoted through her portrait, *Tutoring My Daughter by the Autumn Lamp*. Luo's brief biography, written by her contemporary Jiang Baoling, suggests that the painting was her own creation: "[Luo Qilan] has painted *Tutoring My Daughter by the Autumn Lamp* and requested an inscription from Mister Bingu [Zeng Ao]" 嘗繪秋燈課女圖, 徵題賓谷先生.⁶⁰ Luo also inscribed the painting with a poem portraying her teaching the girl at night in autumn.⁶¹ The whereabouts of the painting is unknown, but we know of its existence from its colophons, recorded in *Poems of Tribute to the Tingqiu Studio* and *Poems to the Tingqiu Studio from My Companions in Women's Quarter*.⁶²

Luo Qilan personally requested some painting colophons, sometimes through the assistance of her male mentors. Thus, we are certain that she wished to make her identity as a dutiful mother known through the circulation of the work. Zhu Delin 祝德麟 wrote: "In former years, the female historian [Luo Qilan] has asked through Jianzhai [Yuan Mei] that I inscribe *Tutoring My Daughter by the Autumn Lamp*" 往歲女史曾介簡齋索余題秋燈課女圖.⁶³ Zeng Ao mentioned in his preface to Luo Qilan's poetry anthology that he "had seen through Menglou old man [Wang Wenzhi] her *Tutoring My Daughter by the Autumn Lamp*" 嘗從其師夢樓老人

⁶⁰ Jiang Baoling, "Nüshi gong shuhua," in *Molin jinhua*, 156.

⁶¹ Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, juan 1, 773. For an English translation, see Idema and Grant, "Luo Qilan," in *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China*, 617.

⁶² Luo Qilan included colophons by male literati in *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, juan 1, 723–38 and juan 3, 773–76 and 781. The compositions by female writers are in *Tingqiuxuan guizhong tongren ji*, 697–99.

⁶³ Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, juan 3, 784.

見其秋燈課女圖。⁶⁴ To show her appreciation for the writers, Luo Qilan composed poems in return, and she included these compositions in *Poems from the Tingqiu Studio*.⁶⁵

The colophon writers promoted Luo Qilan's identity as a mother by praising her for taking up the responsibility of instructing her daughter, and they repeatedly used terms such as “instructing daughter” 課女, “female instructor” 女師, and “female teacher” 女傅. Several writers mentioned the *wanxiong* 丸熊 medicinal pill, a reference that compared Luo with a famous mother who made the pill to provide her son energy to study.⁶⁶ Luo's identity as a dutiful mother could have justified her literary pursuits: the message was that these pastimes did not distract her from her womanly duties, and she put her knowledge to practical use, contributing to her family by providing an education for her daughter.

Looking at *Tutoring My Daughter by the Autumn Lamp* and reading the colophons after it, a viewer would further perceive Luo Qilan as a talented and chaste woman. The colophon authors complimented the literary achievements of Luo by likening her to female poets or scholars of the Six Dynasties period (220–589): Bao Linghui 鮑令暉 (5th century), Xie Daoyun, and Zuo Fen 左芬 (second half of the 3rd century).⁶⁷ These writers also mentioned Luo as a widow and praised her chastity by referring to the *bozhou* 柏舟 poem in the *Book of Poetry*,

⁶⁴ Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, 765.

⁶⁵ One is “Xie Bi Qiufan shangshu ti qiudeng kenü tu 謝畢秋帆尚書題秋燈課女圖,” in *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, *juan* 2, 779. Other poems are in *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, *juan* 3, 814.

⁶⁶ The son is Liu Zhongying 柳仲郢, a son of Liu Gongchuo 柳公綽 (8th–9th century). Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 and Song Qi 宋祁, *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書, *juan* 163 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 5023.

⁶⁷ Xie Daoyun was a daughter of the eldest brother of Xie An 謝安 (320–85), a prominent government official of the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–419), and the wife of Wang Ningzhi 王凝之, a son of the famous calligrapher Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–61). Zuo Feng was a younger sister of the poet Zuo Si 左思 (ca. 255–ca. 306) and a consort of Emperor Wudi (r. 265–90) of the Jin dynasty (265–420). Bao Linghui was a younger sister of the poet and official Bao Zhao 鮑照 (d. 466). For information of Bao, Xie, and Zuo, and translations of their writings, see Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China*, 43–52 and 136–44.

which concerns a young widow's determination to not remarry.⁶⁸ In these ways, the colophon writers took part in constructing identities for Luo Qilan, elaborating them beyond the pictorial content of the painting.

The colophons also reveal different perspectives on women's education and attitudes toward women with literary talents. The writers differed from one another regarding the content of the instruction Luo provided to her daughter. Some, including Yuan Mei and Xie Zhending 謝振定 (1753–1809), thought she used poetry as her teaching material.⁶⁹ Wu Songliang 吳崧梁 was of the same mind, as he wrote about allowing a young relative, a girl of four years old by Chinese count, to learn poetry; he invited Luo Qilan to teach the girl.⁷⁰ Other writers, such as Li Tingjin 李廷敬 and Yu Ji 余集 (1739–1823), used the phrase “passing down classics” 傳經.⁷¹ The term can be a metaphor for teaching, yet it also reminds the reader of the “thirteen Confucian classics” 十三經 that were standard for the education of boys. “Family learning” 家學 was another acceptable curriculum, as indicated by Li Chuanjie 李傳杰 and Wu Xinzong 吳信中.⁷² To these relatively open-minded literati, educational content did not have to be gender-specific, and women were capable of passing down family learning to the next generation.

A few writers presented a more conservative perspective, invoking the common belief among some Qing scholars that women's artistic and literary talents could distract them from their female duties. For these men, the correct materials for women's education instructed

⁶⁸ For a translation of this poem, see John Minford and Joseph S. M. Lau, *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University, 2000), 114–15.

⁶⁹ Yuan Mei, “Ti Peixiang nūdizi qiudeng kenū tu 題佩香女弟子秋燈課女,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, *juan 1*, 724. Xie Zhending, “Qianti 前題,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, *juan 1*, 726.

⁷⁰ Wu Songliang, “Qianti 前題,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, *juan 1*, 735.

⁷¹ Both poems have the title “Qianti 前題,” and they are in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, *juan 1*, 728.

⁷² Li Chuanjie's “Qianti 前題” and Wu Xinzong's “Qianti 前題” are in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, *juan 3*, 775 and 776. “Family learning” means the knowledge passed down within the family for generations.

women on their proper roles in their households and society. Fang Ang 方昂 (1740–1800) surmised that Luo Qilan taught her daughter a chapter from the “admonitions for women” 女箴篇, the didactic texts on ideal feminine behavior in a patriarchal society.⁷³ Zhang Wentao 張問陶 (1764–1814) recommended the daughter not to follow the footsteps of her mother because “harming to people, from beginning to end, are talent and fame” 誤人終始是才名.⁷⁴ Zhou Houyuan 周厚輅 thought that the purpose of the daughter’s education was to make sure that she would have a good disposition 只是教他心性好.⁷⁵ To justify her pursuits in literature amid such conservative views, Luo had to assert her identity as a mother responsible for the education of her child.

In her pursuit of literary fame, Luo Qilan faced many limitations due to her gender. She addressed traditional gender roles in her *Record of Dreams: Eight Poems* 紀夢詩八首, which were later illustrated in *Pictures of Eight Dreams* 八夢圖.⁷⁶ Both Yuan Mei and Wang Wenzhi inscribed this work, and Luo published their compositions in *Poems of Tribute to the Tingqiu Studio*.⁷⁷ An album titled *Record of Dreams from the Tingqiu Studio* contains eight paintings by Pan Simu 潘思牧 (18th–19th century); the facing leaves on the left feature the poems of Luo

⁷³ Fang Ang, “Qianti 前題,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, *juan* 1, 730.

⁷⁴ Zhang Wentao, “Qianti 前題,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, *juan* 1, 732.

⁷⁵ Zhou Houyuan, “Qianti 前題,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, *juan* 1, 737.

⁷⁶ Rachel Bartow Schram translates and studies these poems in chapter 3 of her thesis. Rachel Bartow Schram, “A Life in Dreams: The Dream Motif in the Poetry of Luo Qilan and Ming-Qing Women Writers” (master’s thesis, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2012), 52–82. Idema and Grant provide translations of two poems in *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China*, 616–17.

⁷⁷ Yuan Mei, “Ti Peixiang nüdizi bamengtu 題佩香女弟子八夢圖,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, *juan* 3, 781. Wang Wenzhi, “Qianti 前題,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, *juan* 3, 782.

Qilan, transcribed by Wang Wenzhi.⁷⁸ Depicting her dreams, the pictures include small images of Luo Qilan, making them informal portraits.

The eight poems and corresponding pictures portray Luo Qilan in various roles; while some reflect her real life, others show impossible identities for a woman in imperial China. For example, in the second poem, Luo is a poet who writes compositions on the walls of her study and is able to memorize and recite the content of the scrolls in her collection.⁷⁹ For this poem, Pan Simu depicted Luo Qilan reading by a red desk in front of shelves full of books. The poem and picture are true, representing Luo's interest in literature and her public identity as a writer. Other poems, however, speak of unattainable ambitions for a woman at the time. In the third poem, Luo Qilan dreams of herself as a scholar who succeeds in the civil examination, which was open only to men.⁸⁰ The paired painting shows her wearing the costume of a government official, suggesting the status she gained from passing the exams. In the seventh poem, she is a general in charge of an army at a border pass.⁸¹ The corresponding painting depicts her as a military leader reviewing the troops: she stands atop a fortress and overlooks the army, partly hidden by clouds. As a woman, becoming a government official or military general was beyond Luo's reach, but her poems convey her confidence that she could have obtained such positions if she had been born a man.

Four of the poems are about seeking spirituality and reclusion, two ways that Luo Qilan dealt with the social limitations she faced and the criticism she incurred for following pursuits

⁷⁸ This album appeared in the Sotheby's auction "Fine Classical Chinese Paintings," March 22, 2012. Pan Simu was from the same family as Pan Gongshou 潘恭壽 (b. 1741), a painter and friend of Wang Wenzhi. For Pan Simu's biography, see Li Junzhi, *Qinghuajia shishi, wuxia* 戊下, 263 and Feng Jinbo, *Moxiangju huashi, juan* 10, 113–14. Luo Qilan's contemporaries knew of Wang Wenzhi's assistance in transcribing her poems for her. In one letter from Yuan Mei to Luo, he asks whether or not she would ask Wang to transcribe her poems for a portrait titled *Returning to the Way*. The letter is in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan, fu laishu*, 795.

⁷⁹ For a translation of this poem, see Schram, "A Life in Dreams," 71.

⁸⁰ For a translation of this poem, see Schram, "A Life in Dreams," 72–3.

⁸¹ For a translation of this poem, see Schram, "A Life in Dreams," 75.

that some regarded as inappropriate for her gender. In the first, fifth, and sixth poems, terms from Buddhism and Daoism and descriptions of the realm of the immortals hint at the writer's spiritual life.⁸² Pan Simu illustrated these poems with buildings emerging from clouds, suggesting the realm beyond the human world. Like many educated women of the Qing period, Luo Qilan became a devout Buddhist later in her life.⁸³ She also visited many Buddhist and Daoist sites, as noted earlier. In the fourth dream poem, Luo arrives at a secluded place, where she could meditate.⁸⁴ In the paired painting, she is in a building hidden in a valley and sits on a mat on the ground as if she is meditating. These poems and pictures promote her identity as a reclusive, spiritually minded person.

Through literature, Luo Qilan could let her imagination roam and transform her ambitions and unfulfilled desires into words. However, she still had to face reality; at the end of the seventh poem, she wakes up and discovers that she is still a woman unable to realize her hopes.⁸⁵ Returning to her real life, Luo again had to confront criticism against her literary pursuits. She thus ended this series with a poem that refers to the traditional occupations of farming and making silk.⁸⁶ Pan Simu illustrated this poem by depicting Luo sitting in a rural residence adjacent to planted fields. From the traditional Chinese perspective, the phrase “men plow and women weave” evoked an ideal society and designated the proper division of labor

⁸² For translations of these poems, see Schram, “A Life in Dreams,” 58, 62, and 69.

⁸³ Susan Mann writes that elite women of the eighteenth century, after being freed from their female duties, turned to spiritual quests such as going on pilgrimages, chanting Buddhist sutras, and practicing meditation. Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1997), 66.

⁸⁴ For a translation of this poem, see Schram, “A Life in Dreams,” 65–6.

⁸⁵ The last two lines of the poem are: “the sound of the bell hurries my waking, just as before, I am still wearing bow-shaped shoes.” Schram, “A Life in Dreams,” 75.

⁸⁶ For a translation of this poem, see Schram, “A Life in Dreams,” 80.

according to gender.⁸⁷ Luo used the eighth poem to declare that she valued women's work; as with *Tutoring My Daughter by the Autumn Lamp*, she portrayed herself as a dutiful woman.

The religious side of Luo Qilan was further suggested in another portrait, *Returning to the Way* 歸道圖.⁸⁸ According to Luo, she painted the work and inscribed it in 1796; therefore, the work is a self-portrait:

Personally inscribed *Returning to the Way* with four [poems]. I, since young, already desired to learn the Way [of Daoism or Buddhism], and [this desire] often [became] tangible in [my] dreams. [However,] worldly matters have distracted [me], and suddenly [I am] over forty. Today is the first day of the sixth moon in the first year of the Jiaqing reign [1796]. [I] vow to renounce human affairs [in order to] concentrate in returning to the Way. [I] draw a picture to show my determination and tie it with poems.

自題歸道圖四首。余少時即有學道之願，往往形諸夢寐。塵務蹉跎，忽忽踰四十矣。今嘉慶元年六月朔日，誓將屏棄人事，悉心歸道。寫圖見志并係以詩。⁸⁹

From the clues in Luo Qilan's four poems following this statement, the religion depicted in *Returning to the Way* is a fusion of Buddhism and Daoism. She begins the first poem by mentioning the emptiness in her heart, setting the tone of the series as a spiritual quest, and ends by naming Daoism as one possible way out of the life she now considers meaningless:

⁸⁷ Susan Mann writes about women's work and proper labor division in chapter 6 of her *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*, 143–77.

⁸⁸ The whereabouts of this painting is unknown.

⁸⁹ This text and the following four poems are in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, juan 4, 798.

<p>This year, spring left more in a hurry.</p> <p>The more I see worldly prosperity the more I sense emptiness</p> <p>The most gorgeous “famous flowers” [courtesans] are unfortunately made wet by the rain.</p> <p>The cloudless bright moon does not worry about the wind.</p> <p>From a hundred-year dusty dream, one could awake anytime.</p> <p>To the ten thousand <i>li</i> origin of the immortals, there is a road through.⁹⁰</p> <p>Trying to look toward a deep place in the jade mountain.</p> <p>The fragrant mist of the jade peaches [of the immortals] is just then a fine rain.</p>	<p>今年春去更匆匆， 越見繁華眼越空。 絕艷名花偏著雨， 無雲明月不愁風。 百年塵夢隨時覺， 萬里仙源有路通。 試向碧山深處望， 玉桃香霧正濛濛。</p>
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As mentioned in the second poem, Buddhism can also provide an escape:

<p>Below the lion king’s throne, [I] bow to Vimalakīrti.</p> <p>Revealed to me in the empty mountain the song of collecting herbs.</p> <p>...</p>	<p>獅王座下拜維摩， 示我空山採藥歌。</p>
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⁹⁰ *Li* is a Chinese measurement for distance.

The moon (toad palace) is a double pupil of the sun.	蟾宮常映瞳瞳日，
The burning house can open bright lotuses.	火宅能開的的荷。
...	

Vimalakīrti was a lay Buddhist practitioner famous for his eloquence, and the “burning house” refers to this world of suffering in one of the parables in the Lotus Sutra.

In the third poem, Luo Qilan recalls that as a child, she already possessed an interest in spirituality. Since she is now determined to take a religious vow, as mentioned in her earlier statement, she fulfills her youthful desire:

When I was a child, [I] wanted to wear the robe of an immortal.	幼時想著五銖衣，
Until today, [my] vow has not been broken.	直到而今願不違。
...	
If [I] desire to arrive at Mount Penglai, [I] should arrive.	蓬山欲到應須到，
If [I] know of returning to the lotus realm, [I] can return.	蓮界知歸便可歸。
...	

Mount Penglai was believed to be the dwelling of the Daoist immortals, and the “lotus realm” refers to a Buddhist paradise or Buddha land. Luo’s use of both Daoist and Buddhist terms indicate that both religions could satisfy her spiritual needs.

At the end of the series, in the fourth poem, Luo Qilan speaks of the freedom gained through renouncing worldly concerns and through her religious beliefs:

Blown by the wind all the way, [I] leave lightly.	隨風一路去翩翩,
Henceforth [I will] often roam the grotto heavens. ⁹¹	從此常遊洞裡天。
In golden rooms and beaded curtains, [I] lack the good fortune of love,	金屋珠幃無豔福,
For medicine jugs and sutra scrolls, [I] am deeply fated.	藥壚經卷有深緣。
...	

Several literati wrote colophons for *Returning to the Way*, and Luo Qilan published their texts in *Poems of Tribute to the Tingqiu Studio*.⁹² She requested some of the writings; Wang Wenzhi mentions in a letter to Luo that he composed a poem following her request.⁹³ Despite Luo Qilan's wish to appear as a spiritually minded person, the male writers did not focus on her religious persona; they also addressed her identity as a poet and portrayed her as a female immortal. Calling a poet an immortal had deep historical resonance, for the great Tang poet Li Bai 李白 (701–62) called himself and the Western Han scholar and official Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 an “exiled immortal.”⁹⁴ The art name of the famous Ming painter Wu Wei 吳偉 (1459–1508) was “Little Immortal” 小仙.⁹⁵ As for Luo Qilan, Yuan Mei stated: “[Luo was] temporarily parted

⁹¹ *Donglitian* 洞裡天 is an abbreviation of *dongtian* 洞天, or the “grotto heavens.” For a study of the “grotto heavens,” see Franciscus Verellen, “The Beyond Within: Grotto-Heavens (*dongtian*) in Taoist Ritual and Cosmology,” *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 8 (1995): 265–90.

⁹² Luo Qilan, *Tingquixuan zengyan*, *juan* 3, 762–66, 780, and 783.

⁹³ The letter, beginning with “Fengti guidaotu gushi yizhang 奉題皈道圖古詩一章,” is in Luo Qilan, *Tingquixuan zengyan*, *fu laishu*, 795.

⁹⁴ For Dongfang Shuo, see Li Bai, “Yuhuyin 玉壺吟,” reprinted in *Quan Tangshi* 全唐詩, *juan* 166 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 391. For Li Bai himself, see Li Bai, “Da Huzhou jiaye sima wen Bai shi heren 荅湖州迦葉司馬問白是何人,” reprinted in *Quan Tangshi*, *juan* 178, 414.

⁹⁵ Yu Jianhua 俞劍華, *Zhongguo meishujia renming cidian* 中國美術家人名辭典 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1987), 296.

from Queen Mother of the West” 小別西王母.⁹⁶ Lu Quan 魯銓 characterized her as a “great talent who was originally an exiled immortal” 清才本是謫仙人.⁹⁷ On her gifts as a poet, Yuan Mei wrote: “lowering the brush [to write, she] had abundantly the air of an immortal” 落筆多仙氣.⁹⁸ Zhan Zhaotang 詹肇堂 wrote that “the lady is skilled in poetry and fond of [the matters of] the immortals” 夫人工詩兼好仙.⁹⁹ Thus, once again, the men in her social circle helped to construct her public identity, in this case as a poet on par with the immortals.

Luo Qilan promoted her identity as a painter by giving away her paintings or requesting inscriptions for them, and writings by others affirmed her accomplishments. Luo’s younger brother Luo Qixuan 駱綺軒 wrote a poem titled “Watching Sister Peixiang Making a Painting” 看佩香姊作画 in which he applauded her as an excellent painter.¹⁰⁰ After receiving a painting from Luo, the female writer Hou Ruzhi 侯如芝 (1764–1829) expressed her appreciation by sending Luo a composition.¹⁰¹ In this text, she praised Luo’s painting skills, elevating her above Ma Quan 馬荃 (active first half of the 18th century), a Qing artist famous for her bird-and-flower paintings.¹⁰² Several extant paintings by Luo Qilan carry inscriptions by her famous

⁹⁶ The Queen Mother of the West is a Daoist deity. Yuan Mei, “Ti Peixiang nüdizi guidaotu 題佩香女弟子皈道圖,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingquixuan zengyan*, *juan* 3, 762.

⁹⁷ Lu Quan, “Qianti 前題,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingquixuan zengyan*, *juan* 3, 764.

⁹⁸ Yuan Mei, “Ti Peixiang nüdizi guidaotu,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingquixuan zengyan*, *juan* 3, 762.

⁹⁹ Zhan Zhaotang, “Qianti 前題,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingquixuan zengyan*, *juan* 3, 765.

¹⁰⁰ Luo Qixuan, “Kan Peixiangjie zuohua 看佩香姊作畫,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingquixuan zengyan*, *juan* 3, 775.

¹⁰¹ Hou Zhi 侯芝, also known as 侯如芝, was known for her contribution to *tanci* 彈詞. Ellen Widmer, “The Trouble with Talent: Hou Zhi (1764–1829) and Her *Tanci Zai zaotian* 再造天 of 1828,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 21 (December 1999): 131.

¹⁰² Hou wrote: “from now on, Jiangxiang [Ma Quan] is inferior to Peixiang [Luo Qilan] 從此江香遜佩香.” Luo Qilan included Hou’s writing, “Peixiang furen yi shuzhu shuixian huafu jianzeng shi yi xiezhi 佩香夫人以疏竹水仙畫幅見贈詩以謝之,” in *Tingquixuan guizhong tongren ji*, 714.

contemporaries. For example, the leaves in her *Album of Flowers* 花卉圖冊 (fig. 6.5) in the Palace Museum in Beijing have inscriptions by Wang Wenzhi.¹⁰³

Paintings of and by Luo Qilan presented images of her as a woman who possessed great talent and a reclusive, religious temperament, and these images were affirmed and amplified by the many colophons by her contemporaries. *Tutoring My Daughter by the Autumn Lamp* has sixty-two inscriptions; *Returning to the Way* has thirteen; *Spring View at Pingshan* has ten. These numbers indicate how often Luo's contemporaries viewed her portraits and document their roles in promoting her chosen identities. The paintings thus record Luo's social world and the support she enjoyed from some of the most famous male and female talents of her time.

6.2 Portraits of Wang Yuyan (active late 18th century)

A friend of Luo Qilan and granddaughter of Wang Wenzhi, Wang Yuyan 王玉燕 (art name: Dailiang 玳梁) was another artistically talented woman who was linked to the circle and followers of Yuan Mei. Wang Yuyan appears in two paintings that represent the continuation and development of female portraiture in this social circle in the nineteenth century. *Reading in a Private Studio* 密齋讀書圖 (fig. 6.6) and *Portrait of Wang Yuyan Sketching Orchids* 王玉燕寫蘭像軸 (fig. 6.7) both depict this educated woman enjoying scholarly pursuits in a garden setting.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, instead of showing Wang Yuyan as a conventional beauty in the manner of

¹⁰³ For reproductions of the leaves in this album, see Li Shi 李澍, *Ming Qing guige huihua yanjiu* 明清闺阁绘画研究 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2008), 206.

¹⁰⁴ Both paintings are in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing. For reproductions, see Yang Xin, *Ming Qing xiaoxianghua*, 202-3 and 220–21. Marsha Weidner studies these two portraits in her unpublished paper, “Fact and Originality, Fantasy and Forgery: Constructing Female Artistic Identities in Late Imperial China,” accessed May 12, 2016, https://www.academia.edu/13030801/Fact_and_Originality_Fantasy_and_Forgery_Constructing_Female_Artistic_Identities_in_Late_Imperial_China.

the beautiful-woman paintings, both works capture her scholarly identity. The two paintings have inscriptions by Wang Wenzhi and other Qing literati. These writings are crucial materials for the study of the life and artistic activities of Wang Yuyan, and they shed further light on how Qing men supported and promoted talented women in their families and social networks.

Before Wang Yuyan came of age, she was already an able poet.¹⁰⁵ She was skilled at painting flowers, especially orchids, and was an able calligrapher in her grandfather's style.¹⁰⁶ Her younger sister, Wang Guichan 王桂蟾, was also an artist and skilled at painting orchids, bamboo, and bird-and-flower subjects. Like Yuan Mei, their grandfather Wang Wenzhi supported talented women by writing colophons for them and accepting them as disciples. The Wang sisters grew up in an environment that allowed or even encouraged them to cultivate their artistic and literary interests.

Reading in a Private Studio is an unsigned hanging scroll that depicts a study surrounded by garden rocks and plants, including bamboo and banana trees. In the study, a man in a white robe and a woman in a green robe sit by a table on which an unrolled handscroll is placed next to a few books and scrolls. The full bookshelf in the rear of the study indicates the cultivation of the two people, and the gaze of the man and the hand gesture of the woman pointing toward the unrolled scroll suggest that the two are engaged in a scholarly conversation. *Reading in a Private Studio* bears inscriptions by Wang Wenzhi, dated 1798, and Bao Yatang 鮑雅堂 and Yi Bingshou 伊秉綬 (1754–1815), dated 1807. Wang Wenzhi's inscription, on the left side of the

¹⁰⁵ Feng Jinbo wrote that before Wang Yuyan reached the age of wearing hairpins, she was already capable of poetry 年未笄能詩; wearing hairpins indicated that a girl had become an adult. Feng Jinbo, *Moxiangju huashi*, *juan* 6, 71.

¹⁰⁶ I draw on the following three resources for Wang Yuyan's biography: Dou Zhen 竇鎮, *Qingchao shuhuaqia bilu* 清朝書畫家筆錄, *juan* 4, reprinted in *Sanshisian zhong Qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian*, vol. 42 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 365–66; Shi Shuyi, *Qingdai guige shiren zhenglue*, *juan* 6, 84; Feng Jinbo, *Moxiangju huashi*, *juan* 6, 70–71.

painting, identifies the couple as his granddaughter Wang Yuyan and her husband Wang Yicheng.

An informal, double portrait, *Reading in a Private Studio* is unusual in that the woman and her husband are depicted in almost equal positions: they are both shown in three-quarter view and are similar in size and degree of individualization. In other words, neither figure is visually dominant. With the exception of ancestor portraits, few extant Ming or Qing paintings depict a man and his wife together with such balance. Along with the scholarly activity indicated by the objects on the table, this visual equality suggests that they had a harmonious marital life and were intellectually compatible partners.

As noted earlier, in paintings that function as men's portraits, women are often depicted as servants or entertainers and in clearly subordinate positions. In *Portrait of Jueluo Yongzhong* 覺羅永忠像 (fig. 6.8), a woman stands behind the male figure sitting on a garden rock, and her posture and gaze toward the man identify her as an attendant.¹⁰⁷ In *Three Pleasures of Qiao Yuanzhi* 喬元之三好圖 (fig. 6.9), the three women in the lower left corner are musicians who entertain the male subject.¹⁰⁸ Women also appear in family portraits. The male protagonist in *Portrait of Jiang Shiquan* 蔣士銓像 (fig. 6.10) is enjoying an outing on a boat with his family; the age difference depicted between the two women suggests that they are his wife and his mother.¹⁰⁹ In *Reading in a Private Studio*, however, Wang Yuyan is not providing services, entertaining, or appearing as a dutiful wife or mother. Instead, she is in a conversation with

¹⁰⁷ *Portrait of Jueluo Yongzhong* is in the collection of the Nanjing Museum. For reproductions of this painting, see plates 40 and 41 in Nanjing bowuyuan 南京博物院, *Ming Qing renwu xiaoxianghua xuan* 明清人物肖像畫選 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1982).

¹⁰⁸ *Three Pleasures of Qiao Yuanzhi* is in the collection of the Nanjing Museum. For reproductions of this painting, see plates 34–7 in Nanjing bowuyuan, *Ming Qing renwu xiaoxianghua xuan*.

¹⁰⁹ *Portrait of Jiang Shiquan* is in the collection of the Nanjing Museum. For reproductions of this painting, see plate 42 in Nanjing bowuyuan, *Ming Qing renwu xiaoxianghua xuan*.

Wang Yicheng in their leisure time. The painting thus suggests the “talent and beauty” or “scholar and beauty” (*caizi jiaren*) literary genre, a match valued by many late Ming and Qing scholars, mentioned in chapter 2.

By commissioning *Reading in a Private Studio* and requesting inscriptions for it, Wang Yicheng made the life he shared with his talented wife known to people outside his family. Wang Wenzhi, at the end of his inscription, mentions that he originally composed his text to thank Bao Yatang for inscribing the work: “Bao Yatang, an official in the Ministry of Revenue, inscribed *Reading in a Private Studio* for grandson-in-law Yicheng and praised him excessively; I composed and inscribed a long poem on the left in return with appreciation” 鮑雅堂民部為誥成孫婿題密齋讀書圖，獎譽過當，賦長句謝之，即書於幀左。¹¹⁰ Wang Yicheng, the owner of the painting, not only was willing to show the image of his private life to others but also welcomed comments by inviting others to inscribe the work.

To praise Wang Yuyan’s painting abilities, Bao Yatang draws a parallel between her and Huang Quan 黃荃, the famous bird-and-flower painter of the Five Dynasties (907–79). He also compliments the match between her and Wang Yicheng, with comparisons from nature and art history:

Trees with intertwined branches are a lovely melody.

交枝樹是玲瓏曲，

Birds in conversation are like a beautiful song.

對語禽如宛轉歌。

¹¹⁰ Yatang is the art name of Bao Zhizhong 鮑之鍾. For biographical information of Bao Zhizhong, see Zhang Weiping 張維屏, *Guochao shiren zhenglue* 國朝詩人徵略, *juan* 40, reprinted in *Sanshisan zhong qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian* 三十三種清代人物傳記資料彙編, vol. 41 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 572.

<p>Understanding Zhongji [Guan Daosheng] in pictures.</p> <p>Greatly enamored there was only Zhao Oupo [Zhao Mengfu].</p> <p>Before the jade mirror stand a myriad scrolls displayed.</p> <p>Critiquing poetry and “reading paintings” [they] passed [their] youth.</p>	<p>解識仲姬圖畫裏，</p> <p>多情只有趙歐波。</p> <p>玉鏡台前萬軸陳，</p> <p>評詩讀畫過青春。</p>
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In the first two lines, the images of trees and birds evoke the couple clinging and talking to each other. References to Guan Daosheng 管道昇 (1262–1319) and Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254–1322) of the Yuan dynasty (1206–1368) praise the couple’s compatibility and suggest that Wang Yicheng, like Zhao Mengfu, truly appreciated the paintings by his wife. The last two lines provide a glimpse of the couple’s marital life, surrounded by scrolls and enjoying scholarly activities together. Both the double portrait and the inscription place Wang Yicheng among the Qing literati who sought or at least appreciated an educated wife.

Luo Qilan composed a colophon for a painting of Wang Yicheng in his lakeside studio, *Whiling Away the Summer at A Lakeside Estate* 湖莊消夏圖, that also hints at his harmonious relationship with Wang Yuyan.¹¹¹ After describing Wang Yicheng as a talented scholar (*caizi* 才子) and complimenting his studio, Luo Qilan wrote: “A man with refined feelings like this sits alone, thus why not paint the lady Qinglian (referring to Madame Dailiang)” 如此雅懷人獨坐，因何不畫女青蓮 (謂玳梁夫人). Qinglian, or “blue lotus,” was the art name of Dong Bai 董白

¹¹¹ Pang Yuanji 龐元濟 records the painting, colophons, and seals in *Xuzhai minghua lu*, vol. 2, 753–57.

(1623–51), a famous courtesan and painter who married the Ming scholar and calligrapher Mao Xiang 冒襄 (1611–93).¹¹² In Luo Qilan’s colophon, “the lady Qinglian” refers to Dailiang, the art name of Wang Yuyan. As Mao Xiang was accompanied by Dong Bai, Luo suggests, Wang Yicheng should be paired with Wang Yuyan since both unions were the ideal talent-and-beauty matches.

Wang Wenzhi’s inscription on *Reading in a Private Studio* provides glimpses of aspects of Wang Yuyan’s upbringing that made her a desirable candidate for a scholar who sought a wife capable in the arts:

Dailiang from childhood served at my side.	玳梁生小侍余側，
[She] did not like having fun [with other children] but preferred playing with ink.	不喜分甘喜弄墨。
When playing, [she] opened scrolls.	作戲時將卷軸翻，
In her spare time, [she] personally chose them without discrimination.	偷閒私取之無識。
At first, [she] painted clusters of Xiang River orchids.	初寫湘江蘭蕙叢，
Gradually, [she] arrived at various flowers, grasses and insects.	漸涉諸華及草蟲。
[For a] famous teacher nearby [she] called on Pan Gongshou. ¹¹³	名師近拜潘恭壽，

¹¹² For English resources on Dong Bai and Mao Xiang, see the following sources: Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 98–9; Ellen Johnston Laing, “Women Painters in Traditional China,” in *Flowering in the Shadows: Women in the History of Chinese and Japanese Painting*, ed. Marsha Weidner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1990), 85.

¹¹³ Pan Gongshou was a versatile painter skilled in various subjects. He learned brush skills from Wang Wenzhi and copied works of earlier masters. He looked to Yun Shouping (1633–90) for flower painting and to Mi Youren

[For a] female ancestor far away, [she] continued [the	嫡祖遠紹文端容。
tradition] of Wen Duanrong [Wen Shu]. ¹¹⁴	
The old man held [her] on his knees,	老夫抱著加諸膝，
[By a] table wiped clean, [he] personally held the brush	棊几磨揩親把筆。
[and her hand to instruct her in writing.]	

This proves that Wang Wenzhi was directly involved in the education of his granddaughter. In addition, Wang Yuyan grew up with an interest in painting, studied with Wang Wenzhi's friend Pan Gongshou (born 1741), and followed Wen Shu 文淑 (1595–1634), a late Ming female artist famous for bird-and-flower painting.

In the same inscription, Wang Wenzhi indicates his earlier concern over finding a husband for Wang Yuyan who would support her artistic interests, and he expresses his contentment with the family of Wang Yicheng for treasuring his granddaughter. Wang Wenzhi ended his poem with two lines indicating his relief: “Countless talented people mourn not meeting; among [the women of] the inner chambers unexpectedly you obtained a true friend” 無限才人悲不遇; 閨中偏爾得知音.¹¹⁵ Wang Wenzhi's inscription speaks to the importance of

(1074–1153), Dong Qichang (1555–1636), Shen Zhou (1427–1509), and Wen Zhengming (1479–1559) for landscape. Pan was also a poet and was interested in Buddhism, specifically Chan or meditative Buddhism. These pursuits colored his paintings and perhaps influenced the works of his student Wang Yuyan. The information about Pan Gongshou is drawn from the following resources: Dou Zhen, *Qingchao shuhua jia bilu*, 329; Wang Yun, *Yangzhou huayuanlu*, *juan* 3, 410–11; Feng Jinbo, *Moxiangju huashi*, *juan* 6, 65; Li Junzhi, *Qinghua jia shishi*, *dingshang* 丁上, 203; Jiang Baoling, *Molin jinhua*, 100–1.

¹¹⁴ Wen Shu was a descendent of Wen Zhengming (1470–1559), and she was especially famous for her bird-and-flower paintings. Tang Shuyu 湯漱玉 collected writings on Wen Shu as a painter and her familial background in *Jade Terrace Painting History* 玉臺畫史, a book devoted to women painters. Tang Shuyu, *Yutai huashi*, *juan* 3, reprinted in *Qingren huaxue lunzhu* 清人畫學論著, *xia* 下 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 2011), 353.

¹¹⁵ The word “true friend” (*zhiyin* 知音) comes from the story of Boya 伯牙 and Zhong Ziqi 鐘子期: Boya broke his *qin* and vowed never to play this instrument again after Zhong Ziqi, his *zhiyin*, passed away. Lü Buwei 呂不韋, *Lushi chunqiu xin jiaoshi shang* 呂氏春秋新校釋上, ed. Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), 744–45.

male support in the life of an artistically talented woman: the attitude of her husband would determine whether or not she could continue to pursue her interests after marriage.

A union with Wang Yuyan may also have offered social advantages for Wang Yicheng, allowing him to expand his social circle not only through her grandfather but also through her reputation as an artist. Wang Yuyan had contact with many respected scholars. For example, Zeng Ao, one of the colophon writers of the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll, inscribed a fan painting by Wang Yuyan.¹¹⁶ At Wang Wenzhi's request, Wang Yuyan drew an auspicious orchid with flowers growing from the same base, which symbolized a harmonious marriage, for Chen Wangzhi 陳望之.¹¹⁷ And Yuan Youkai 袁又愷 requested pictures of bamboo and cypress from Wang Yuyan and Luo Qilan to honor his mother.¹¹⁸

Wang Yicheng's family background and interests in collecting and appreciating art likely contributed to his support of his wife's artistic pursuits. According to Wang Wenzhi's inscription for *Reading in a Private Studio*: "His [Wang Yicheng's] family has been collecting calligraphy and paintings for generations; Yicheng's inborn nature also leads to his indulgence in calligraphy and paintings" 伊家屢世蓄書畫; 詣成性復耽書畫. Growing up within a family tradition of collecting art, Wang Yicheng was able to authenticate paintings and likely had a comprehensive knowledge of art history.¹¹⁹ Since Wang Yicheng owned and appreciated art from a young age

¹¹⁶ Wen Wenzhi, "Zeng Bingu ti Dailiang huashan ciyun fengxie liangshou 曾賓谷題玳梁畫扇次韻奉謝兩首," in *Menglou shiji*, 23.6b.

¹¹⁷ Wen Wenzhi, "Chen Wangzhi qinjia zhaizhong penlan de tongxin bingdi liangzhong ming nusun Dailiang weizhi xiezhaoshi 陳望之親家齋中盆蘭得同心並蒂兩種命女孫玳梁為之寫照綴以詩," in *Menglou shiji*, 17.4b.

¹¹⁸ Both Wang Wenzhi and Luo Qilan recorded this request. Luo Qilan painted cypresses, Wang Yuyan drew bamboo, and Wang Wenzhi inscribed the scroll. Wen Wenzhi's text begins with "Yuan Youkai yubiao qimu Han taianren zhi jie 袁又愷欲表其母韓太安人之節." Wang Wenzhi, *Menglou shiji*, juan 24.1b. Luo Qilan's text begins with "Yuan Youkai hui bozhu louju tu 袁又愷繪柏竹樓居圖." Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, juan 4, 792.

¹¹⁹ In the colophon composed for *Whiling Away the Summer at A Lakeside Estate*, Wang Wenzhi wrote about Wang Yicheng's capability in determining the authenticity of art works. Pang Yuanji, *Xuzhai minghua lu*, vol. 2, 753.

and was accustomed to literati society, he was prepared to appreciate Wang Yuyan's engagement with such activities and the possibility of pursuing them with her.

According to an inscription by Wang Wenzhi, *Portrait of Wang Yuyan Sketching Orchids* (fig. 6.7) was painted by Pan Gongshou, a friend of Wang Wenzhi and a painting teacher of Wang Yuyan.¹²⁰ In this painting, Wang Yuyan appears as a mature woman, sitting behind a stone desk beneath a tree, surrounded by porous garden rocks. On the desk are writing utensils, a vase of cassia flowers, and a piece of paper or silk. Holding her brush in midair, she seems to be contemplating the next ink stroke to place on her unfinished painting of orchids, a plant with noble symbolic associations favored by Chinese scholars.

The portrayal of Wang Yuyan recalls that of Liao Yunjin in the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll. In their respective portraits, Wang and Liao are presented as scholars in garden settings rather than as beauties. The composition of Wang Yuyan's portrait resembles that of *Woman Reading in a Garden* (fig. 6.11), a beautiful-woman painting, as both pictures depict a woman sitting under a tree in a garden and engaged in a traditional literati activity.¹²¹ However, Wang's image as a proper middle-aged lady is conveyed through her modest dress and the painting's lack of erotic symbolism. Instead of perceiving Wang Yuyan as a beauty, the viewer focuses on her identity as an honorable woman of artistic talents.

¹²⁰ The friendship Pan Gongshou had with Wang Wenzhi was likely one reason that enabled him to teach Wang Yuyan and paint her portrait. For the friendship between Pan and Wang, I refer to the following resources: Wang Wenzhi, "Lianchao lin Ding Nanyu shiliu Yingzhen xiang 蓮巢臨丁南羽十六應真像," in *Kuaiyutang tiba* 快雨堂題跋, in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* 中國書畫全書, vol. 10 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2000), 817; Wang Wenzhi, "Dong Xiangguang jishang yanyun huajuan 董香光几上烟雲畫卷," *Kuaiyutang tiba*, 813; Wang Wenzhi, "Pan Lianchao lin Zhao Ziang Zhongfeng chanshi xiang 潘蓮巢臨趙子昂中峰禪師像," *Kuaiyutang tiba*, 817; Wang Wenzhi, *Menglou shiji*, 23.3a.

¹²¹ This painting is in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. For a reproduction and an analysis of this painting, see Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure*, 179–81.

Wang Wenzhi wrote two colophons for *Portrait of Wang Yuyan Sketching Orchids*. In both, he first transcribed writings of others and then wrote a poem in response. The uppermost text speaks of the family education of Wang Yuyan from the perspectives of Zeng Ao and Wang Wenzhi. It begins with a poem that Zeng Ao composed for a painting by Wang Yuyan:

Grandfather's poetry and calligraphy are both	阿翁詩翰兩如神，
celestial like that of a god,	
Only in painting [does he] yield to the ancients.	只有丹青讓古人。
[He] made up for it by obtaining the family	補得右丞家法在，
method of <i>youcheng</i> , ¹²²	
[His] granddaughter's painting is also without equal.	女孫畫筆又無倫。

Zeng Ao uses this opportunity to compliment his friend Wang Wenzhi, for he attributed Wang Yuyan's literary skills to the education she received from her grandfather. The second part of this colophon consists of two poems composed by Wang Wenzhi to express his gratitude to Zeng Ao. In the first poem, he also mentions Wang Yuyan's education:

In the women's quarters [they] only join in	閨中惟合祀針神，
worshipping the Needle Goddess. ¹²³	
Who sends offerings of brushstrokes to copy the	誰遣供皴仿昔人。
ancients?	

¹²² *Youcheng* was the official title of Wang Wei (701–61), a great poet and painter of the Tang dynasty (618–907).

¹²³ Xue Lingyun 薛靈芸 (fl. 220–26), an imperial concubine, was venerated as the Needle Goddess. Daria Berg, *Women and the Literary World in Early Modern China, 1580–1700* (London: Routledge, 2013), 69.

On a half-sheet of Korean paper [I] instruct [my]
granddaughter.¹²⁴

半幅蠻箋課孫女，

A poor family's happiness lies in familial bonds.

貧家樂事在天倫。

Here, Wang Wenzhi confirms that he was involved in the education of Wang Yuyan, from which he gained satisfaction. He also contrasts traditional women's activities with those of his granddaughter. Wang Wenzhi was pleased with Wang Yuyan's achievements, for in the second poem he compliments Zeng Ao's words that make Wang Yuyan his artistic inheritor: "Salt Controller's poetic talent is as marvelous like that of a god; the 'sudden teaching' [in his poem] makes the young girl [my] successor" 都運詩才妙如神，頓教幼女作傳人。¹²⁵

The two portraits of Wang Yuyan, like the portraits of Luo Qilan and the *Thirteen Female Disciples* scroll, speak of the importance of male support for a woman to pursue her scholarly interests and make herself known as a painter or poet. A supportive, open-minded father would allow her an education in art and literature, and a sympathetic husband and in-laws would permit the continuation of these cultivations. These relatives did not consider the engagement in literary and artistic activities a distraction. As the portraits and painting inscriptions suggest, Wang Yicheng might even have encouraged these pursuits. Therefore, through Wang Yuyan's portrait images and social activities, making paintings for and requesting writings from others, it was possible for her to establish her public persona as an educated woman and painter.

¹²⁴ The word *manjian* 蠻箋 refers to paper from Korea or Sichuan. *Hanyu dacidian* 漢語大詞典, vol. 8 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1983), 1014.

¹²⁵ Salt Controller was Zeng Ao's official title from the fifty-seventh year of the reign of the Qianlong emperor (1792) to the twelfth year of the reign of the Jiaqing emperor (1807). For a biography of Zeng Ao, see *Qingshi liezhuan* 清史列傳, *dachen zhuan cibian ba* 大臣傳次編八, *juan* 33, printed in *Sanshisan zhong Qingdai renwu zhuanji ziliao huibian*, vol. 5 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2009), 125.

6.3 Paintings by Luo Qilan and Wang Yuyan

Many female poets in the circles of Yuan Mei and Wang Wenzhi were also painters; some of their paintings survive in museums and private collections, and others are known through written accounts. The biographical information of these women is often brief and scattered, and therefore their paintings and related texts are crucial materials that provide glimpses into their social and artistic lives. This chapter concludes with an examination of paintings believed to be by Luo Qilan and Wang Yuyan. These pictures, again, suggest the support these women received from their male mentors, friends, and family members.

Luo Qilan was known to her Qing contemporaries as a painter; however, the name of her teacher and the extent of her artistic education were not clearly recorded in texts. She could have learned painting from her literati acquaintances, and one possible instructor was Wang Wenzhi. As Jiang Baoling recorded, Wang was famous among Qing scholars for his calligraphy, but he was also a painter.¹²⁶ Through her male acquaintances, Luo may have gained access to local art collections and thus could learn through copying works by others. Judging from her extant paintings and related Qing texts, she mostly worked in the bird-and-flower genre and followed the styles of Yun Shouping 惲壽平 (1633–90). A poem also indicates Wen Shu (art name, Duanrong) and Chen Shu 陳書 (1660–1736; art name, Nanlou) as her models: “[For] earlier [models, I] imitate Duanrong’s traces; [for] recent [ones, I] steal Nanlou’s manuscripts” 遠仿端容蹟; 近竊南樓稿.¹²⁷ Painting gave Luo Qilan pleasure and was an important part of her private

¹²⁶ Jiang Baoling, “Wang Menglou meiju 王夢樓梅菊,” in *Molin jinhua*, juan 3, 77.

¹²⁷ Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, juan 6, 824.

and social lives. About 1802, she wrote that she would stop composing poetry to make paintings.¹²⁸ Painting also provided a means to support her family and to participate in the social customs of male literati, by giving her works as gifts and requesting inscriptions for them.¹²⁹

The Palace Museum in Beijing has a painting titled *Peonies* 芍藥圖 (fig. 6.12), believed to be a creation by Luo Qilan.¹³⁰ The hanging scroll features a cut peony branch with three white flowers growing from the same stem. The branch is depicted on an undefined background, as if floating in midair. On the right edge is a brief inscription indicating the painter: “Juqu female historian Luo Qilan drew” 句區女史駱綺蘭寫. Above the plant is Wang Wenzhi’s inscription, recording the circumstance surrounding the creation of the work and including a poem he composed for Zeng Ao. According to Wang, the painting was based on an auspicious sighting of three peony flowers growing from the same base, which took place in the summer of the *yimao* year (1795).

The *Peonies* painting and related Qing texts are some of the best records of the associations between Luo Qilan and her intellectual contemporaries. Wang Wenzhi also recorded in his collected writings the event that inspired the painting:

In Xiao Garden in Yangzhou, one peony had three flowers growing from the same base.¹³¹ I playfully named it “Three Flowers,” and Bingu [Zeng Ao] composed “Three Flowers” that is a skillful *ci* verse. I am unable to surpass [him and so] make an eight-line poem to fulfill his request nominally.

¹²⁸ Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, juan 6, 824.

¹²⁹ Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, juan 6, 824.

¹³⁰ For a reproduction and brief introduction of this painting, see Li Shi, *Ming Qing guige huihua yanjiu*, 205–07.

¹³¹ Xiao Garden was where the Qing scholar and government official Cheng Mengxing 程夢星 (17th–18th century) lived in retirement. According to Li Dou 李斗 (fl. 1764–95), the garden was famous for its literary gatherings during the Qing dynasty. Li Dou, *Yangzhou huafang lu*, 172 and 325–27.

揚州篠園芍藥有一朮三萼者，余戲以三朵花名之，賓谷為賦三朵花詞甚工，余弗能繼，作以律體塞其請。¹³²

Zeng Ao seemed to be very fond of the auspicious sight of the three flowers; he wrote about it, ordered a handscroll painting to represent it, and requested colophons for the scroll from his fellow men and women of letters. Zeng Ao wrote that he saw the three flowers in Xiao Garden during the reign of the Qianlong emperor (r. 1735–95).¹³³ The artist responsible for his order was Qian Dong 錢東 (b. 1752), the husband of Yuan Mei's student, Lu Yuansu. Lu also contributed her embroidery to the scroll.¹³⁴ Zeng Ao continued to develop works about the three flowers, and his effort in requesting writings from others can be seen in Wang Wenzhi's text, translated earlier. In a letter to Luo Qilan, Yuan Mei mentions that Zeng Ao had entrusted to him a handscroll painting of peonies in order to gather colophons by women in Yuan's circle.¹³⁵ This painting may have been part of the same project, that of commemorating the three peony flowers.

Luo Qilan participated in the project by contributing her literary and artistic skills. She composed a *ci* verse in response to the composition by Zeng Ao.¹³⁶ For Zeng Ao's efforts regarding the three flowers, she transcribed poems by three women, one surnamed Mao 茅 and

¹³² Wang Wenzhi, *Menglou shiji*, 24.7a.

¹³³ Zeng Ao, *Shangyü maowu shiji* 賞雨茅屋詩集 (1819), 18.14a.

¹³⁴ For Qian Dong, Lu Yuansu, and Lu's embroidery for Zeng Ao, see Li Junzhi, *Qinghuajia shishi, wuxia* 戊下, 275. Zeng Ao wrote a series of four poems, and one note mentions the contribution of Lu Yuansu. Zeng Ao, "Ti xie Peixiang furen sanduohua shihua xiufu 題謝佩香夫人三朵花詩畫繡幅," in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, *juan* 2, 747.

¹³⁵ Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan, fu laishu*, 790.

¹³⁶ Luo Qilan, "Sanduohua 三朵花," in *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, *juan* 4, 790.

two Bao 鮑, and converted Zeng's words into embroidery.¹³⁷ Luo also painted the three flowers, as recorded by Feng Jinbo 馮金伯 (active 18th century):

In the spring of the *yimao* year [1795], I went to Juqu. Peixiang [Luo Qilan], through her younger brother Wenfeng, immediately gave me an orchid painting. Afterwards, in the studio of Wenfeng, [I] saw her paintings, *Three Peony Flowers* and *Apricot Flower and Spring Swallow*, which had already galloped into the room of Nantian [Yun Shouping].

予于乙卯春至句曲，佩香即介其弟文峯以畫蘭見貽。繼于文峯齋中見其所畫芍藥三朵花及杏花春燕諸圖，已駸駸入南田之室。¹³⁸

The words “galloped into the room of Nantian” praise Luo Qilan for mastering the style or painting manner of the famous Qing painter, Yun Shouping. In addition, the text records that by 1795, Luo had already created a painting showing three peony flowers.

Luo Qilan's involvement in Zeng Ao's project likely made her reputation, for a Qing poet named Le Jun 樂鈞 (1766–1814) requested from her a painting of the same subject:

[I] traveled by boat to Jingkou and passed by Tingqiu Studio to request that Lady Peixiang [Luo Qilan] make a painting of three peony flowers. [I also asked] that she transcribe [her] “Three Flowers” *ci* verse and the compositions by Bao

¹³⁷ Zeng Ao, “Ti xie Peixiang furen sanduohua shihua xiufu 題謝佩香夫人三朵花詩畫繡幅,” in Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, *juan* 2, 747.

¹³⁸ Feng Jinbo, *Moxiangju huashi*, *juan* 9, 108.

Wanyun, Chaixiang, and Mao Ruixian, three talents from the inner chamber, on the edge. I composed a poem to express appreciation.

舟次京口過聽秋軒，求佩香夫人畫芍藥三朵花，並錄所賦三朵花詞及鮑浣雲，
菑香，茅蕊仙三閨秀和作于幅端，賦詩以謝。¹³⁹

In the collection of the Nanjing Museum, there is a fan painting titled *Bamboo, Rock, and Narcissus* 竹石水仙圖 (fig. 6.13), another creation by Luo Qilan that records her social activities.¹⁴⁰ On the left side of the fan is a rock with short bamboo growing beside it. In front of the rock are two narcissi stretching toward the artist's seals and inscriptions on the right. The text begins with a poem and concludes with documentation of the date and circumstance surrounding the creation of the work; the fan was a gift to a gentleman named Pan Yijun 潘奕隼 (1740–1830). Luo's inscription reads:

During the Jiaqing reign, in the autumn of the *jiwei* year [1799] is the grand celebration of the sixtieth [birthday] of Mister Ronggao [Pan Yijun]. [I] made an insignificant poem to congratulate. [I] also drew a picture, *Immortals Offering Birthday Congratulations*, and sent it for [your] advice and correction.

¹³⁹ Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, juan 2, 754.

¹⁴⁰ For a reproduction and a brief introduction of this painting, see Cao Qing 曹清, *Xianggui zhuzhen: Ming Qing caiyuan shuhua yanjiu* 香闺缀珍: 明清才媛书画研究 (Nanjing: Jiangsu meishu chubanshe, 2013), 109–11.

嘉慶己未秋日，榕皋先生六十大慶，作小詩一首奉祝，並寫群仙祝壽圖寄呈教
正。¹⁴¹

Pan Yijun was a Qing scholar and government official; he also supported female talents by accepting them as disciples.¹⁴² The social circles of Pan Yijun and Luo Qilan overlapped, suggesting that the two knew each other through their shared literati friends, including Luo's teachers Yuan Mei, Wang Wenzhi, and Wang Chang 王昶.¹⁴³ Aside from the *Bamboo, Rock, and Narcissus* fan painting, Luo Qilan and Pan Yijun shared other exchanges. Luo's *Poems of Tribute to the Tingqiu Studio* includes two writings by Pan Yijun: a colophon for her *Tutoring My Daughter by the Autumn Lamp* and a poem in which Pan praises Luo's literary achievements.¹⁴⁴ Their relationship could have motivated her to make the fan for his birthday.

Pan Yijun was a prolific writer, calligrapher, and painter. In addition to landscape painting, he was fond of painting flowers, including the orchid, with expressive brushstrokes.¹⁴⁵ The fan contains congratulatory motifs rendered in brushstrokes that resemble calligraphy, making it a flattering birthday gift to a scholar and painter. When choosing a painting method for the fan, Luo Qilan possibly had Pan Yijun's artistic preferences in mind, as she used monochrome ink to render her subjects. In Chinese, the term *bamboo* (*zhu* 竹) is a pun for

¹⁴¹ For information of Pan Yijun, see Jiang Baoling, "Ronggao xiansheng xieyi 榕皋先生寫意," in *Molin jinhua*, 160.

¹⁴² Gui Maoyi, one of Yuan Mei's female disciples, was also a student of Pan Yijun. Pan Yijun, *Sansongtang ji* 三松堂集 (1809), *sansong ziding nianpu* 三松自訂年譜, 30a. In one poem from Luo Qilan to Pan Yijun, one note indicates another female student named Zhou Sufang 周素芳. Luo Qilan, "Yu Hanshang cheng Pan Ronggao xiansheng guofang shuaicheng yishou 寓邗上承潘榕皋先生過訪率承一首," in *Tingqiuxuan shiji*, *juan* 5, 802.

¹⁴³ Pan's autobiography records that in 1791, he had a gathering with Yuan Mei, Wang Wenzhi, Wang Mingsheng 王鳴盛, and Qian Daxin 錢大昕. Pan Yijun, *Sansongtang ji*, *sansong ziding nianpu*, 16b. Wang Mingsheng and Qian Daxin both contributed colophons to the *Thirteen Female Disciples*. Wang Chang wrote a preface to Pan's collected writings. Pan Yijun, *Sansongtang ji*, *xu* 序, 2a.

¹⁴⁴ Luo Qilan, *Tingqiuxuan zengyan*, 735 and 741.

¹⁴⁵ The information of Pan Yijun is from Jiang Baoling, "Ronggao xiansheng xieyi," in *Molin jinhua*, 160.

congratulate (*zhu* 祝), the narcissus (*shuixian* 水仙) stands for *immortal* (*xian* 仙), and the rock (*shoushi* 壽石) symbolizes longevity (*shou* 壽). Thus, the combination of the three subjects conveys Luo's wish: may the group of immortals congratulate you on your birthday.¹⁴⁶

As discussed earlier, Wang Yuyan's scholarly capabilities were captured in her two portraits, *Portrait of Wang Yuyan Sketching Orchids* and *Reading in a Private Studio*. Her skills in painting are further suggested by a few fan paintings in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing; three have already been published, and all of them have inscriptions by Wang Wenzhi.¹⁴⁷ *Ink Orchid* 墨蘭圖 (fig. 6.14) features her favorite painting subject, the orchid, in monochrome ink. The plant is depicted on the right side of the fan, its leaves branching toward the left. The orchid appears without a ground or rocks, as if floating in midair. The fan has two seals, *yu* 玉 and *yan* 燕, the two characters of Wang Yuyan's given name, in the lower right corner.

Her grandfather Wang Wenzhi contributed an inscription, and his poem reads:

Who supplements poems by Guangwei [Shu Xi 束皙]	誰補廣微詩，
As if establishing the biography of Lingjun [Qu Yuan 屈原].	似立靈均傳。
Occasionally sketching two or three flowers,	偶寫兩三花，
Their secluded fragrance fills the desk and ink stone.	幽香生几硯。

The first two lines mention two ancient scholars: Shu Xi of the Western Jin dynasty (266–316) and Qu Yuan, who served the Chu state of the Warring States period (ca. 475–221 BCE). Both

¹⁴⁶ Terese Tse Bartholomew, *Hidden Meanings in Chinese Art* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 2006), 166.

¹⁴⁷ For reproductions of these three, see Li Shi, *Ming Qing guige huihua yanjiu*, 88–9.

scholars were associated with the orchid through their compositions, such as Shu Xi's "Supplementary Poems" 補亡詩 and Qu Yuan's "On Encountering Trouble" 離騷.¹⁴⁸ By including these two names, Wang Wenzhi likened Wang Yuyan, a female talent fond of painting orchids, to the great literati in China's past.

Plum Blossoms and Narcissus 梅花水仙 (fig. 6.15) is another fan painting by Wang Yuyan in the collection of the Palace Museum. On the right side, the work shows a narcissus plant in front of two blossoming plum branches that stretch across the fan. The plum blossom was a favorite plant of Chinese literati for its symbolism of fortitude.¹⁴⁹ The narcissus reminds the viewer of Zhao Mengjian 趙孟堅 (born 1199), a Yuan-dynasty scholar and painter famous for his paintings of this plant.¹⁵⁰ In Wang Yuyan's fan, both plants are rendered in monochrome ink. In the far left corner are her seals, *yu* and *yan*, and a brief inscription: "During the summer of the *yimao* year (1795), in the fifth moon, Yuyan traced" 乙卯夏五月玉燕臨. Wang Wenzhi's inscription on the lower left indicates his granddaughter's model, a painting by Wang Guxiang 王穀祥 (1501–68), paired with an inscription by Lu Zhi 陸治 (1495–1576). Wang Guxiang and Lu Zhi were both Ming-dynasty (1368–1644) scholars and artists in the circle of Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470–1559), one of the Four Masters of the Ming. As indicated in Wang Wenzhi's inscription, Wang Yuyan's fondness of copying their work suggests that she shared their scholarly tastes for style and subjects. A viewer with knowledge of Chinese-painting history

¹⁴⁸ "Supplementary Poems" are a series of six compositions, and the first includes the word *cailan* 采蘭 ("picking orchids"). For this poem, see Xiao Tong 蕭統 and Li Shan 李善, *Zeng bu Liu chen zhu Wen xuan* 增補六臣註文選, *juan* 19 (Taipei: Huazheng shuju, 1977), 353. For a translation of Qu Yuan's poem, see Minford and Lau, *Classical Chinese Literature*, 240–53.

¹⁴⁹ Bartholomew, *Hidden Meanings in Chinese Art*, 212.

¹⁵⁰ For Zhao Mengjian, see Xia Wenyan 夏文彥, *Tuhui baojian* 圖繪寶鑑, *juan* 4, reprinted in *Huashi congshu* 畫史叢書, vol. 3, edited by Yu Anlan 于安瀾 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1963), 92.

would recognize the tradition Wang Yuyan was following, and her choices placed her among many other similarly minded literati who also appreciated such a tradition.

In addition to personal preferences, Wang Yuyan's interest in the works by Ming scholars could have been affected by her grandfather. Wang Wenzhi's collected writings, *Kuaiyutang Colophons* 快雨堂題跋, includes his compositions on calligraphy and paintings. Several writings positively address works by Ming literati-amateur artists, including Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427–1509), Zhu Yunming 祝允明 (1461–1527), Lu Zhi, Wen Zhengming, and Wen Peng 文彭 (1498–1573).¹⁵¹ As indicated in Wang Wenzhi's inscription for *Reading in a Private Studio*, Wang Yuyan grew up by his side. The works appreciated by the grandfather could have been the materials used in the art education he provided to his granddaughter.

Conclusion

Many literati in the circle of Yuan Mei were supporters of female painters and poets, and their endorsements enabled the talented women among them to become known. These fortunate women included Luo Qilan and Wang Yuyan, whose paintings record the contributions they received from these sympathetic scholars. Examination of the paintings' artistic styles, pictorial subjects, and colophons furthers our understanding of their social and artistic lives and supplements their sparse biographical information in printed documents. Their works and related texts, similar to the *Thirteen Female Disciples*, speak of the positive attitude toward women in this specific coterie of intellectuals during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

¹⁵¹ Wang Wenzhi, *Kuaiyutang tiba*, 800 and 812.

Conclusion

This dissertation concerns an era in which an increasing number of educated Chinese women turned to the arts, especially poetry and painting, as a result of more progressive attitudes of certain male scholars toward female talents, education, and roles. However, still pervasive were the conservative views and social expectations; thus, support from men was essential for talented women to lead literary or artistically fulfilled lives and to access the social networks that they normally lacked, in order to become known in these newer roles. One sympathetic male scholar was Yuan Mei, a great eighteenth-century poet and the protagonist in this dissertation, who supported female writers and painters by writing about them, accepting them as students, and promoting their literary compositions. As discussed in chapter 2, Yuan's familial background of growing up surrounded by educated female relatives nurtured his lifelong interest in helping female talents. *Thirteen Female Disciples Seeking Instructions at the Lake Pavilion*, a handscroll Yuan ordered, documents his acceptance of learned women as students later in his life and represents one of his meetings with some of them in 1792.

Examples of male support of talented women are also discussed in chapter 6, through paintings related to *Thirteen Female Disciples*, including portraits of Luo Qilan and Wang Yuyan and their flower paintings. Both the pictorial content and the production of these pictures and paired inscriptions reveal that Luo and Wang were encouraged by male literati in their pursuits of scholarly interests and reputations. The colophons for *Spring View at Pingshan* are endorsements from Luo's mentors and peers for her unconventional life: she stepped out of the customary sphere of women and assumed the traditional male identity of a roaming poet who composed literary works about famous sites. Luo often participated in the social activities of her

literati peers, and some of her flower paintings, including *Peonies* and *Bamboo, Rock, and Narcissus*, were made for these occasions. My study of these two works suggests that Luo's identity as a painter was recognized and encouraged by these men. *Reading in a Private Studio* and *Portrait of Wang Yuyan Sketching Orchids* present the artistically fulfilled life of Wang Yuyan due to the support from her grandfather, Wang Wenzhi, and her husband, Wang Yicheng. Her fan paintings, including *Ink Orchid* and *Plum Blossoms and Narcissus*, display a scholarly taste through their subjects and brushwork, reflecting the education in painting and calligraphy she received from her grandfather, a famous scholar and calligrapher.

Despite the emergence of more positive perceptions of educated women, traditional views of gender relations and women's talents and roles still affected the paintings and inscriptions studied in this dissertation. As noted in chapter 2, Yuan Mei directed the production of *Thirteen Female Disciples* toward a more favorable representation, one that transformed an event in which both men and women participated—a potential scandal—into a women's elegant gathering. The painting's lack of male participants made the picture more acceptable to conservative viewers; the visual emphasis on the students as learned individuals promoted the interpretation that Yuan's many interactions with them were based on his appreciation of their scholarly abilities. As examined in chapter 6, Luo Qilan justified her pursuit of scholarly interests and her engagement in activities outside her home through her portraits, including *Tutoring My Daughter by the Autumn Lamp*, a scroll that circulated among many of Luo's contemporaries. In it, she promoted her identity as a dutiful mother who put her knowledge to practical use by providing an education for her child. Similarly, in one leaf of *Record of Dreams from the Tingqiu Studio* and its paired inscription that refers to the traditional female occupations of making silk, Luo declared that she valued women's work.

As discussed in chapters 3 and 6, pictures of male scholars at leisure were the primary pictorial sources for the painters of *Thirteen Female Disciples* and some portraits of Luo Qilan and Wang Yuyan. The compositional features and depicted scholarly activities identify *Thirteen Female Disciples* as an elegant-gathering painting. Although women's literary societies were not uncommon at the time, their representations were rare. The 1792 meeting at Sun Jiale's lake pavilion and men's elegant gatherings shared characteristics; paintings of the latter events were therefore appropriate models. The individuals in *Thirteen Female Disciples* and Luo and Wang in their portraits are shown cultivating themselves through literary and artistic activities in a landscape or garden, depictions that recall portraits of male literati. These artistic choices not only corresponded to but also promoted, through the circulation of these paintings, the public identities of these women as writers and artists.

Chapters 4 and 6 address the discrepancy between textual and visual portrayals of talented women in the circle of Yuan Mei. In the popular imagination, many educated women, including Yuan Mei's students, were beauties with literary and artistic talents, like the subjects of beautiful-woman paintings. This genre casts the depicted women as ideal companions for male scholars, and their charms are rendered through pictorial conventions that convey male-defined characteristics of feminine beauty. In contrast, in *Thirteen Female Disciples* and portraits of Luo Qilan and Wang Yuyan, the subjects are shown as less idealized, modestly dressed, self-contained individuals with scholarly abilities, and the gender relations seen in these paintings are unconventional. The primary male figure in *Thirteen Female Disciples* is separated from most of the female figures by physical distance and an architectural boundary. In *Portrait of Wang Yuyan Sketching Orchids*, the couple is presented in almost equal standing, as neither is pictorially dominant. Moreover, absent from these paintings are suggestive postures and objects typically

used as sexual indicators in beautiful-woman paintings. All of these artistic choices discourage the viewer from interpreting the portrayed intellectual women as dependent upon men as lovers, entertainers, and attendants—the common female roles in numerous Chinese paintings.

Another theme, explored in chapters 3, 4, and 6, is the formation of the public identities of the talented women in the circle of Yuan Mei. The patrons, painters, and colophon writers all took part in constructing, amplifying, and affirming the depicted identities of the women. The painters portrayed Yuan's students, Luo Qilan, and Wang Yuyan as self-sufficient individuals, comfortable in their surroundings. The depictions of these female intellectuals engaged in literary and artistic activities emphasize their scholarly personas. In the case of *Thirteen Female Disciples*, some colophon authors further imagined Yuan's students to be immortals and spirits of nature; likening these women to beings beyond the human world excused them from their unconventional behavior. But the authors also portrayed the women as idealized beauties with literary and artistic talents, as ideal companions for male scholars; such descriptions politely complimented their physical appearances but led to the supposition that their male teacher had less than honorable intentions. Though Luo Qilan is presented as a dutiful mother in *Tutoring My Daughter by the Autumn Lamp* and as a spiritually minded person in *Returning to the Way*, the inscriptions on these paintings suggest that she also inspired her peers as a literary and chaste woman. Most of the artists and colophon authors of these paintings and *Thirteen Female Disciples* were male, and thus the visual and textual representations reflected men's ideas of these women. Luo Qilan was the only woman with clear agency in developing and promoting her public identity: some of her portraits were made according to her literary compositions, and her efforts to have the scrolls circulated among her contemporaries were documented by the many colophons for them.

By studying painting inscriptions, chapters 5 and 6 shed light on Yuan Mei's diverse social circle through which his female students became known. Yuan's circle consisted of both male and female intellectuals; like Yuan, many male scholars supported talented women. Some colophons were written by Yuan Mei's female students; through requesting inscriptions, he invited them to participate in a traditionally male social activity. These inscriptions also document the positive reception of the paintings' figures by their contemporaries. In general, the authors often responded to the pictures by following conventional approaches to certain subjects, elaborating on the paintings' themes, referring to past precedents, and projecting their imaginations on the depicted figures. For *Thirteen Female Disciples*, the colophons often focus on Yuan Mei as an educator and refer to the depicted female intellectuals collectively as his talented and beautiful students. Many inscriptions for portraits of Luo Qilan compliment her chosen identities and are therefore endorsements for her unconventional life and pursuits in scholarly interests and fame.

As studied in chapter 5, Yuan Mei's support for and pride in having many female students led to the creation of multiple pictures. Various Qing-period texts record these paintings, and *Thirteen Female Disciples* survives as at least four handscrolls in three museums and one private collection. The Qing texts often lack sufficient information to identify the documented works and their relationships to one another. In addition, they do not record the number of the paintings Yuan Mei ordered and whether or not they were identical. Among the multiples of *Thirteen Female Disciples*, a brief inscription on the Zhejiang Provincial Museum scroll identifies it as a traced copy. The other three handscrolls lack significant variation, and the hands of the artists are difficult to identify; the painters were minor artists with few works extant and studied, and the colophon authors could have employed ghostwriters to meet the demand for

their works. Thus, it is uncertain which of these scrolls was the original ordered by Yuan Mei. Others could have had the scroll copied, as could Yuan Mei himself. One certain motivation was admiration for the individuals in the main painting and the public fascination with the pictorial theme. Another was potential personal gain, as Yuan's fame greatly increased the monetary value of works related to him. In the case of *Thirteen Female Disciples*, and other paintings like it, authenticity does not depend on seeing the hand of a particular master in a work but rather on determining how the multiples relate to one another and the original.

Yuan Mei was not the first or the last male scholar to accept female students; however, as a prolific writer who enjoyed both domestic and international fame, he promoted awareness of his disciples to a much broader audience. In addition, Yuan ordered the production of *Thirteen Female Disciples*, a rare yet significant visual document of not only his interaction with his pupils but also a more receptive attitude toward talented women at the end of the eighteenth century. The survival of this work enables art historians to join the research, already begun by scholars in the fields of Chinese literature and cultural studies, concerning the depicted coterie of intellectuals. This dissertation is the first comprehensive study, from the perspective of an art historian, to address paintings of and by women in the circle of Yuan Mei. Its analysis of the content and production of these works contributes to a better understanding of portraits of talented women in late imperial China, the artistic and social lives of these women, the male support they received, and the formation and reception of their public identities.

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